



Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council

Protect • Preserve • Maintain

ESTABLISHED 1969

SPRING 2023

Happy Spring! There's one word, unusual for Southern California, that describes the past few months. That's RAIN!! So much RAIN!! It's wonderful to see the hills so green, streams that have been dry for years flowing briskly, flowers starting to bloom, and happy wildlife! Over the past few years of drought, I have seen coyotes so desperate for water that they were coming in from the open space behind the equestrian center to drink from the horse waterers. It was nothing to see them crossing the arena when we were riding. That was in the fall, now they're back in their element and safe. Can't wait to see the spring pups! **All the rain has affected trail users (cabin fever for sure!) and the trails. Please remember to wait until the trails are reasonably dry and parks have opened them for use.**

Happily, most folks do that, and it shows on the trails with minimal damage from horses, bikes, and hikers. There are a few folks who don't really care and if you know some of them, please influence them to change their ways! I'm looking forward to some nice hikes when the dry weather comes.

Because of all the rain, we have challenges in our trail work, including downed trees, slides, water encroachment, trail blow outs, and lots of growth. **This spring would be a great time to join a trail work day** and take advantage of opportunities to learn some very unique trail building skills. Check out our [work schedule](#) on the website! If you see trail issues during your wanderings, you can [contact us](#) and we can get the information to the appropriate agency.

There have been some changes in the Trails Council Board this year. Ruth Gerson, our President for so many years, has stepped down. **She's done an amazing job leading this Council since 1997** and has been on the board since 1979. We are grateful for all her tireless work for the trails and advocacy for the trail community. Thank-you Ruth! I have very big boots to fill! I'm Barb Thomas and was Vice President of the Trails Council. **I'm honored to take the reins as President now and happy to have Ruth, our very first President Emeritus, as my mentor.** A bit about me. I've grown up around horses and got hooked on long distance endurance riding in high school. That led me to a great appreciation of the trails and started me hiking for fitness and volunteering to help maintain trails. During college, I backpacked on the Appalachian Trail, New Hampshire's White Mountains, and many other areas on the east coast. I started serious trail

work in the Shenandoah Mountains and George Washington National Forest in the early 80s. After moving to California in 1997, I continued trail work out here and became a Trails Council board member in 2005. Since then, I've become a crew leader, **coordinate the annual Trail Days event**, and help with the Backbone Trek. I'm looking forward to my new role as Trails Council President! Fleshing out our board officers, George Sherman is our Vice President, Sheryl Phelps will remain as Treasurer, and new board member Melody Reilly is our Secretary. Thank-you all!



We have some great articles in this newsletter, including recognitions, highlights of past and ongoing projects, and upcoming events. For even more inspiration and when you're itching to get out there, check out our [amazing website](#) for projects, volunteer opportunities, and resources and [Facebook](#) for photos of past work! Sick of the gym?? We can guarantee a full body workout on the trails, out in nature, that will beat any treadmill, fixed bike, and weigh room combined!

Plus, you get the satisfaction of seeing your handiwork and knowing that trail users will enjoy it for a long time. **We have many other opportunities for members to get involved**, including occasionally writing proposals, helping on big events like Trail Days, Backbone Trek, the annual dinner, and some administrative tasks. Feel free to [contact us](#) to volunteer! You may have just the skills we need. See you on the trails!

Barb Thomas

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Why We Work On Trails

As Trails Council volunteers when discussing our work on the trails, we are frequently asked, “**Why do you do this?**” Our most common answer is “**it’s our way of giving back**”. This is certainly true on the individual level. However, as an organization, the Trails Council has a broader and more comprehensive goal. An unspoken, but very important part of our mission is creating “Land Stewards”.

What is a Land Steward, you may ask. The short definition of a steward is “a person who manages another’s property or affairs”. In this case we are talking about inspiring individuals to help in caring for and managing these beautiful mountains.

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, is often referred to as the Nation’s largest urban park. It is over 150,000 acres in size. It’s Mediterranean climate and unique geology supports several plant communities. This environment supports an amazing wildlife diversity. During our annual Backbone Trek, we typically observe over one hundred different blooming species.

As a part of our mission, we hope that bringing volunteers into the mountains to share the beauty and uniqueness of the mountains, they will develop an appreciation for how extremely fortunate we are to have this beautiful wilderness parkland right in our backyard. While enjoying the natural beauty of the mountains, we also see evidence of the many threats to the environment. These threats take several forms; fires, floods, declining wildlife habitat and human development. This park was established by the extremely hard and long efforts of many individuals and organizations. But it is under constant threat from the numerous threats mentioned. If the mountains are to remain the beautiful place that they are, constant vigilance is required by many people or “stewards”. **We hope that each SMMTC member and volunteer will become one of these “stewards”** and aid in the management and preservation of the natural beauty of these mountains. Stewardship can be performed in many ways; e.g. direct active volunteering, financial donations to supporting organizations, actively supporting groups and organizations involved in the many activities to protect and manage the parks and by supporting political leaders committed to preserving parkland and the environment in general.

-Jerry Mitcham

Spring is here, and with the rains, the ticks are back. The most common ticks in our area are the deer tick, the dog tick, and the lone star tick.

The deer tick, also known as the black-legged tick is a carrier of Lyme disease. It is mostly found in humid coastal areas and along the trails. These ticks are very small, so if you see a dark spot on your clothing that is no bigger than a freckle, watch it for a moment, and if it moves, it’s a tick. The CDC estimates that approximately 30% of deer ticks carry the Lyme disease. The bite of this tick is characterized by a bulls-eye rash.

The dog tick, also known as the brown tick, prefers canines to people. It is unusual for a brown tick to bite humans. This tick is easily recognized by its reddish-brown color and elongated body shape. These ticks can carry Rocky Mountain Spotted fever, *Canine Babesiosis*, and *Canine Ehrlichiosis*. But again, unless you are a dog they will most likely leave you alone.

The lone star tick, so called because young adult females have a white, star-shaped dot located on their back. Males do not have this dot. These ticks are aggressive biters that feed on prey throughout their lifespan. They bite humans, pets, livestock, and wild animals. Their bite can cause a rash, called STARI -for Southern tick-associated rash illness- that can be very uncomfortable and cause headaches, fever, muscle or joint pain, fatigue, etc.

If you go for a hike, most insect repellents will repel ticks. And always look yourself over after a hike or ride to make sure you don’t have any “hitch hikers” on you.

-John Kross

**Lookout for Ticks!
Ticks are looking
for you!**



40th Annual Trail Days - April 21-23

How does free camping at the Danielson Ranch in Point Mugu State Park, a barbecue dinner, coffee & bagels in the mornings and the chance to win one of a few dozen prizes - in exchange for some much needed work on our trails, sound? We could sure use your help! Come work with us for a day or two. We have been gathering together in April as hikers, equestrians, runners and cyclists to work on the trails we love and use since 1981. We have crew leaders from the Trails Council, the Sierra Club Task Force and CORBA to teach you the basics of trail work (if needed) and then guide you as we work on several different trails in the park. The recent rains have provided ample opportunity to repair stream crossings and washed out sections of the trail. In some areas you might be building or clearing drains. Working on trails is good exercise and many of us find it enjoyable. When the weekend is over, your trails are in better shape and we all benefit.

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY



SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS TRAIL DAYS

A fun weekend for individuals, families, and groups to help build and restore local trails

Our 40th year!



Friday-Sunday
April 21-23
Point Mugu State Park

www.smmtc.org/traildays

REGISTER ONLINE OR CALL BARB AT (805) 509-3426 BY APRIL 17



Volunteers can enjoy...

Free camping on Friday and Saturday nights, under the sycamores and oaks in the heart of Point Mugu State Park.

Hot drinks and bagels for breakfast.

Complimentary Saturday night BBQ for volunteers.

Thank-you gift drawings after work on Saturday and Sunday.



DON'T FORGET TO BRING

- Work boots or sturdy shoes
- Work gloves
- Sun hat
- Protective clothing (long pants/sleeves)
- Sunscreen
- Lip balm
- Insect repellent
- Water bottle
- Lunch and snacks (to eat at work site)
- After-work appetizers/beverages
- Reusable plate, mug, utensils
- Camping gear, if staying overnight

Tools are provided, but you can bring a pick, shovel, Pulaski, McLeod, pruning saw, or long-handled loppers. Please, no lightweight tools or chainsaws.

DIRECTIONS AND VEHICLE ESCORT HOURS

From Newbury Park, exit US-101 at Wendy Dr. South 2.7 mi to end of the road. Right onto Potrero Rd. Left at T-junction with S Reino Rd. Left onto Big Sycamore Canyon Rd (restricted NPS service road). Continue to the vehicle escort meeting point.

CAUTION: THIS IS NOT THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO PT MUGU STATE PARK!

ARRIVE

Friday	5:00 pm, 7:00 pm
Saturday	7:30 am, 4:30 pm
Sunday	7:30 am

DEPART

Saturday	4:00 pm, 9:00 pm
Sunday	8:00 am, 2:30 pm

IMPORTANT NOTE ON ACCESS

Cars will be escorted in/out by authorized California State Parks employees, in caravans, **ONLY** at the times shown. At all other times the entry gate will be locked.

Come for a day, or the weekend!
No trail work experience needed!
There's a fun job for everyone!

Help improve trails and parks for all of us to enjoy!



www.smmtc.org/traildays



Santa Monica Mountains Trail Days is supported by California State Parks and National Park Service; sponsored by Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council, Santa Monica Mountains Task Force (Sierra Club), Concerned Off Road Bicyclists Association, and many generous members of the local community.



What trails will we be working on?

- Upper Sycamore Canyon
- Blue Canyon
- Sin Nombre
- Coyote
- Two Foxes

The rain will have provided us with many options this year. Streams of water carried off some bits of trail, many sections will require rebuilding and in some cases re-routing. As they say "Many hands, make light work". The more volunteers, the more work we get done.

[Come Join Us!](#)

The Importance of Native Bees

Trail users are familiar with the phrase “Leaves of three, let them be”. This reduces the amount of knowledge required to help many (not all!) people from contacting poison oak. Are there three leaves? Must be poison oak. Assumptions have proven quite useful in life and often save us time and energy that we can devote to other more pressing tasks. With an assumption like this, much of the available knowledge is filtered out and replaced with a bit of fear and an easy to remember phrase.

Our knowledge of bees is quickly reduced to “flying insect that stings, makes honey and lives in hives”. The honeybee that is so commonly observed in our neighborhoods and on public lands becomes the de facto bee while other species of bees are seen as exotic and unusual. That decision is made without thinking too much about how nature seems to work.

“Native Bees come in as many shapes, and colors as the flowers they pollinate.”

We are a clever species and more than 8,500 years ago we figured out how to manage a species of bees to pollinate crops and produce honey, wax & honeycomb. The western honey bee, *Apis mellifera* is native to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Bees in this species have been subdivided into at least 20 recognized subspecies, **none native to the Americas**. As a result of mankind’s intervention, a subspecies of the western honey bee is living far beyond their natural range - economic benefits related to pollination and honey production easily explain this.

Across the globe, bees developed into more than 20,000 species of which some 4,000 plus are native to the United States. They range from the tiny (2 mm) *Perdita minima* to large (2.54cm) species of carpenter bees. Bees also come in as many shapes, and colors as the flowers they pollinate. They can live in the ground or a cavity in a tree or stump, be solitary, live in small colonies or even sleep in flowers.

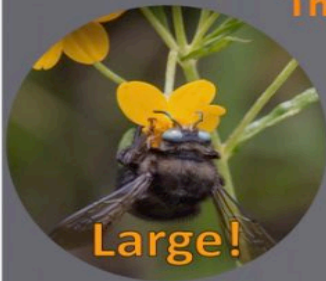
In our local mountains, native bees evolved with the native plants they pollinate. With some plants, if you eliminate the pollinator, you eliminate the plant and vice-versa. A small percentage of plants require a different pollination technique. Buzz pollination (vibrating their thorax at approximately 400hz) is a skill that some native bees utilize to extract pollen from flowers unlike their European cousins. What makes our public wild lands “wild” are the native plants and creatures that live there. Invasive plants and creatures are a potent threat to the variety of flora and fauna as they occupy the same space and usurp pollination roles that have slowly evolved over time.

I posted an image of a native flower with what I thought was a native bee on social media. Most people clicked “Like” and scrolled through. Several more “learned” people indicated that this was a honey bee and indeed not native. Realizing your assumptions can be wrong is an important first step, only if you take the opportunity to fill in the knowledge gap. ***The more you know, the less you know... Keep on learning and try not to rely on assumptions!***

For much more info, I recommend Krystle Hickman’s site at <https://beesip.com/> Her website is a great resource to fill in knowledge gaps about native bees. She offers flash cards with in-depth info on many species of native bees.

Native bees are not western honey bees!

They are the bees we need to save!



Images are not to scale

Point Mugu State Park Trail Signs Project

The Trails Council has partnered with State Parks to assess and improve the trail signage in Pt. Mugu State Park. This includes funding and installation of new signs plus the removal of obsolete signage. All new signs will have UV protection and be installed with tamper-resistant hardware.

During multiple survey trips throughout the park with members of the Trail Corps volunteers from CSUCI, we found many existing signs were unreadable due to fire, vandalism or extensive sun damage. In addition, we noted that many signs have incorrect or obsolete trail names, incorrect mileage or confusing destination wording as well as there being a complete lack of signage identifying the route of the Backbone Trail. We also found that only about 10% of the trail junctions were completely signed.

Each existing sign and all junctions in the park were photographed, mapped and documented in a spreadsheet with comments as to current status and recommendations for improvement. Suggestions were also added for new signage at unsigned junctions and for signs that should be considered for removal, resulting in a comprehensive plan for signing the entire park.

One of the outcomes of this effort was realizing the complexity of the trail system in Pt. Mugu State Park. There are 39 named trails/roads covering 72 miles with 7 entry points and 64 junctions. This makes developing a signage plan challenging as there are oftentimes multiple routes to a specific point in most areas of the park.

Given the large size of the park, we decided to implement the project in multiple phases. Phase 1 includes 33 signs in the areas with the highest traffic: trails easily accessible from Sycamore Canyon Campground, the Ray Miller Trail, the Mugu Peak area and the signs leading to the waterfall in Upper Sycamore Canyon including for the first time a sign at the turnoff to the waterfall. We will also be addressing the westernmost Backbone Trail signage from the La Jolla Canyon Day Use Area to the Wood Canyon Vista Trail in this phase. Installation of the Phase 1 signs will begin once we receive the order later this spring and then we'll begin the process of identifying the candidates for Phase 2 signs which we hope will be installed this coming fall. The remaining phases are targeted for early next year.

-Jon Sheldon



L-R: Jon Sheldon, Bryan Loya



Trail Work Report - September to March

Trail	Events	Hours	Vol#	Work Accomplished
BBT - Saddle Creek	7	553	95	Repaired tread and installed dozens of drains. Winter storms caused major damage. Volunteers moved rocks and boulders to re-create the trail obliterated by the large volume of water!
Serrano Valley	9	435	73	Major portions of this trail were rebuilt - no maintenance had been performed in recent memory. Lots of brush was cleared including a fair amount of poison oak. We persevered through rain, wind and mud to clear more than two miles of trail.
BBT - Old Boney Trail	2	201	36	We worked with a large group of trail runners to clear 2,100 feet of heavily eroded trail.
Odds & Ends	18	1184	178	We worked with CSUCI students, served as crew leaders for NPS Public Lands, Day and COSCA Fall Work Day. Several of the crew worked on the Pelican Bay trail in the Channel Islands.
Wood Canyon Vista Trail	2	225	36	We worked with CORBA to fix several long standing problems and to install a dozen or so drains as well as repairing nearly a mile of trail.

- Trails in Serrano Valley and the Backbone trail from Pioma Creek towards Stunt Road were the primary focus for a three month period. Sixteen events were held in effort to repair these sections of trail from beginning to end.
- The 22/23 CSUCI Trail Corp - an investment towards attracting trail workers of the future - have been busy working and learning the tricks of the trade.
- Dave Edwards led several trips to the Santa Cruz Islands to work on Pelican Bay Trail.
- Barry Dydyk organized several Eagle Scout projects in Point Mugu State Park.
- These efforts amounted to more than **2,500 hours!**

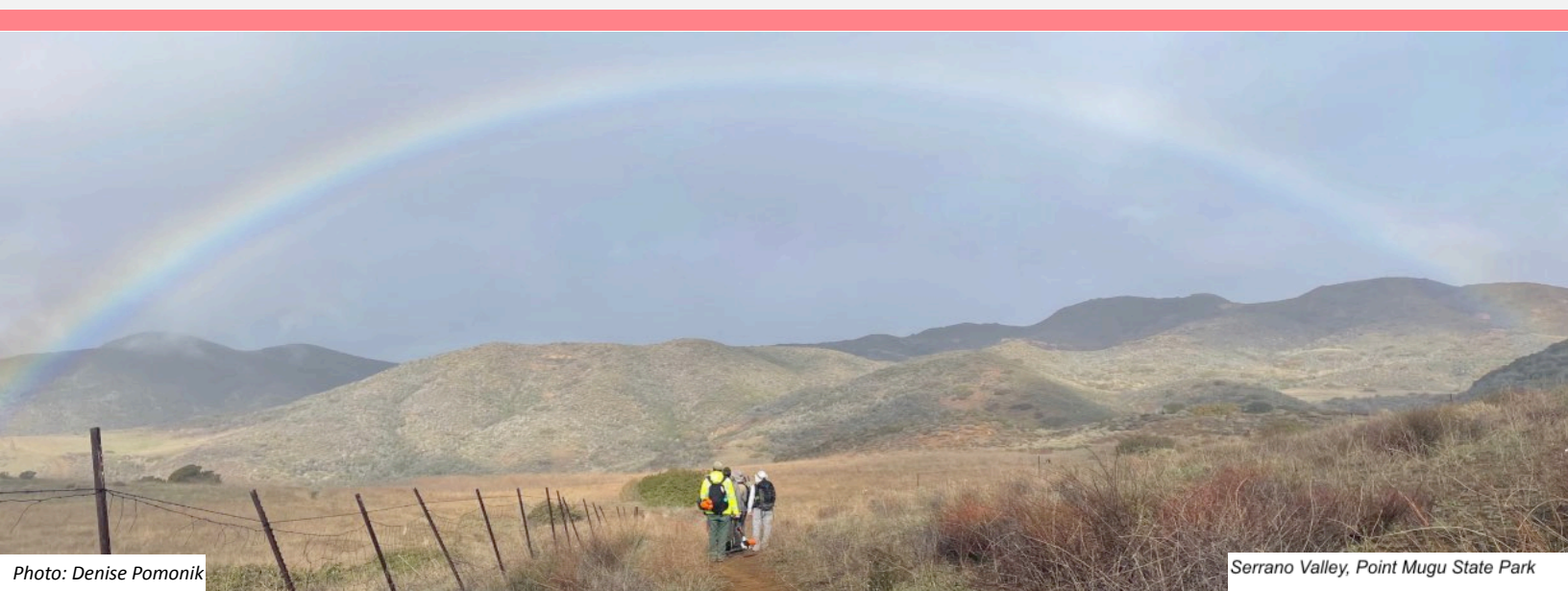



Photo: Denise Pomonik

Serrano Valley, Point Mugu State Park

Norm & Sharon Simmonds 20+ Years of Volunteering



Sharon worked as a Nurse before retiring. She has previously volunteered her time and professional skills at Interface Children and Family Services in Camarillo. Sharon was the SMMTC Hank Grateful Volunteer of the Year in 2014 and has averaged 200 hours per year working trails.

Norm is such a dedicated volunteer he was chosen as our Hank Grateful Award winner twice! (2002 and 2006). He averaged over 250 hours a year working on trails for a 20 year period! Norm also organized our Wednesday trail work events for many years.


At some point after traveling the equivalent of 10 times around the equator by motorcycle, Norm Simmonds decided he was ready to shift gears.

Hiking had been a favorite activity for Sharon and Norm. While hiking, a chance encounter with our trail crew led to Norm signing up to do trail work with Milt McAuley. After a few months of volunteering, Norm brought Sharon along and after more than 20 years of volunteering, the pair remain a fixture on the

trail crew. Norm is the master of drains and Sharon set the standard for grooming the trail, wielding the McLeod in ways that transform a rough and lumpy trail to smooth and out-sloped.

Over the past 23 years, we have accounted for more than 9,100 volunteer hours between them. Those are amazing numbers but what they do not show is how good they are at mentoring new volunteers and organizing work events while maintaining a high level of quality. Norm and Sharon epitomize the volunteer spirit that gets things done!

L-R Solomon, Lauren, Bridgette & Viviana



The California State University Channel Islands Trail Corps has been a success in terms of providing entry into the world of trail maintenance. Our four students work alongside veteran crew leaders and are mentored in the ways small and large of trail work. Each student's enthusiasm is a gift to our crew. We are hoping to inspire the next generation of crew leaders with this effort.

SMMTC Board Member Changes

Welcome to new board members, Melody Reilly and Peter Sullivan!

Melody is a horse lover and enjoys riding at Paramount Ranch and in Malibu Creek State Park. She keeps her horse at Ruth's ranch and Ruth brought her "into the fold" of the Trails Council. Melody was elected to the Board in December 2022 and has assumed the role as Secretary of the Board. We are delighted that her work on taking minutes is of the highest quality and she has already provided numerous suggestions to improve the mission of the board.

Peter has lived in California most of his life and joined the board in February 2023. He is an

avid mountain biker, has coached the Newbury Park High School mountain bike team, and mentors kids. He is also a director for Concerned Off-road Bicyclists Association and is an advocate for safe and appropriate trail use. Peter also works on trails. On many occasions he has brought out the mountain bike team and their parents to work on trails.

Check out the [full bios](#) for Melody and Peter on the website!

Mike Epler left the board in January. Mike was our Membership Chair, helped write proposals, worked on trails, and was our connection to the running community. He will be missed, and we wish him the best as he moves on to other trail activities.

President Emeritus - Ruth Gerson

I resigned recently as president of the Trails Council due to a serious health problem, cancer.

Fortunately, you're not supposed to die from the strain that I have; and my doctor is ensuring that I will enjoy more time riding my horses along the trails in the future. Life is a challenge, so the limitations I now face are just part of the journey.

Since 1969 I have been strongly involved in most aspects of the SMMTC, physically, emotionally and mentally.

We came together as an organization over concerns for trails in our local mountains. Working tirelessly for decades, we helped make possible the extensive trail system of today. Trail easements were a substantial part of our efforts. Piece by piece, easements and SMNRA land acquisitions showed our progress. The building of a trail running 67+ miles from the Will Rogers Trailhead to the Ray Miller Trailhead was the crowning achievement of that effort. Riding my horse on the entire length of that trail is one of the highlights of my life so far.

During July 18-23 of 2016, I led a group of five women riding horses along the newly completed Backbone Trail.

We camped every night at an agency campground or private location; we had friends bring us dinner each night where we camped; we brought food for us and hay for our horses; and we had great support from the many people who scouted the trails for downed trees and other possible problems. You can read more about this ride on our [website](#).

It was a fun-filled adventure, especially since I had my last hip replacement just a year earlier. I rode to inspire others, particularly seniors, since I was 81 at the time. I especially wanted to publicize the trail as it had just been designated a National Recreation Trail in June 2016.

Ready to handle whatever else life throws my way, I am still riding my horses and working with the SMMTC. Having recently celebrated my 88th birthday, I look forward to a few more!

-Ruth Gerson



Left to right: Jeanne Wallace, Janet Paterson, Ruth Gerson, Tracey Potter and Kimberly Gustafson complete the 67-mile Backbone Trail.



2016 Backbone Challenge Ride July 18 - July 23

Board of Directors

Barb Thomas, President

George Sherman, Vice President

Sheryl Phelps, Treasurer

Melody Reilly, Secretary

Don Brusselars

Jerry Mitcham

John Kross

Peter Sullivan

Ruth Gerson, President Emeritus

Individual Membership

Annual - \$35 Family - \$60

Lifetime - \$360 Can also be paid over 3 consecutive years @ \$120 per year

Business Membership

Supporter - \$100

Patron - \$250

Benefactor - \$500

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ ZIP _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

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to
Access
online

Dues are on a rolling 12-month basis. Membership dues are effective the first of the month following receipt of funds; membership will be effective for 12 months. Please make your check payable to SMMTC and mail it to P.O. Box 345, Agoura Hills, CA 91376. Memberships can also be purchased on our website using Paypal.

Make a Donation?

*SMMTC is a tax exempt,
non-profit organization
under IRS code 501(c)(3)*

**Thank you for
your continued
support!**

Generous Supporter:

Award Winning Luxury,
Fitness & Wellness
Retreat

THE RANCH
MALIBU™

OUR STORY

Since 1969, the Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council has been the only organization devoted to representing all trail user groups in the Santa Monica Mountains. We are a volunteer nonprofit organization, dedicated to establishing, preserving and maintaining the public trail system throughout the Santa Monica Mountains and adjacent areas through education, advocacy and partnership with public and private sectors.

We coordinate with various government agencies to enhance and preserve the trail system. We assist in negotiations with property owners regarding trail alignments. We promote public awareness and build, monitor and maintain trails.

Upcoming Events

40th Annual Trail Days — April 21st to April 23rd

Backbone Trek — May 6th - May 13th

Annual Dinner Meeting — October 26th

Board Meetings (Currently held via Zoom)

Board Meetings are open to the public and are on the 4th Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm. There are 4 exceptions: No meeting in August; April meet on the 2nd Thursday; Nov & Dec, meet on 1st Thursday.

CONTACT US

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