

# Corriganville Trails

**History:** The park area was first used by the Chumash Indians. A unique genetic sequence has been found in historic period Chumash Indians and in human long bones excavated on Santa Rosa and San Miquel islands, the which date to 13,000 and 13,500 years before present, respectively. It appears the Chumash used Corriganville for temporary camps while exploiting the unique resources of the area. One major use would have been during the month of October for the harvest of the acorns from coast live oak trees. One camp is likely to have been used by Indians either the evening before or after using the trail in the canyons over the pass between the Simi and the San Fernando valleys. The Indian trail on the Chatsworth side of the pass seems to have been what we now refer to as "Devil's Slide." On the Simi side that trail seems to have run, more or less, down the bottom of the canyon to the Smith Road area. (It seem that Santa Susana Pass, i.e., "*kasiwe*", was up what we now call Lilac Lane to the top of Devil's Slide, rather than what we now refer to as Santa Susana Pass.)

During the Spanish and Mexican periods of settlement travelers used that same route down the canyon, i.e., "*Des Revina*." Indeed, the original El Camino Real had a connected mission, so that travel way connected the San Fernando and the San Buenaventura missions and ran through Santa Susana Pass. During the Anglo-American Period of settlement travelers initially used the same route, although it initially remained a single tract affair. Locally it was referred to by some as "Fremont Pass" - ostensibly implying that Captain John C. Fremont and his small band of men used the pass. There is no evidence to suggest that Fremont used *Des Ravina* during his invasion of southern California. However, a family on the north side of Smith Road did find what appears to be a cannon ball grown over in the fork of a giant oak tree that partially collapsed next to their house.)

During the 1850s settlement in California south of Marin County was focused near or along the coast. However, the one north-south stagecoach line ran over the Tejon Pass and up through the San Joaquin Valley. So, there was a great push to establish a coastal stage route. In order to do this each county was required to build its portion of the road and whatever improvement were required. At the time, road building in the state was limited to roads within incorporated cities. (What is now Ventura County was part of Santa Barbara County.) Los Angeles County already included a used road into the northwestern San Fernando Valley and the Board of Supervisors was determined to expend as little money as possible building their portion of the stage route. They pointed at the old Indian trail/ El Camino Real route, strait up the extremely steep hill over bedrock - certainly less than a mile in length - and insisted that it was the route to be used. Once constructed it may have been the first "e-ticket" ride in California. The stagecoach operated through Simi Valley until 1875, but the road continued to be used by some locals until the new "freight road" was completed.

In 1894 the freight road was completed on the Los Angeles side of the pass and was then built on the Ventura County side and finished in 1999 coming down to the Smith Road south of the Corriganville parking lot. It can still be seen to the discerning eye.

The railroad had reached Chatsworth in the late-1880s and reached Simi Valley by 1902. The railroad decided to construct a one-mile-long tunnel through the mountains. That tunnel began, from both ends, in 1900 and was completed in 1904. The rock cuttings from the west side were spread out at about the same level as the tunnel orifice and forms the higher level of land on the southern side of the main trail through the park. Notice the large oak trees which are growing out of the north-facing slope of the tailing. Those trees are now more than a hundred years old.

The freight road was replaced by State Route 118 - what we now call the "old pass road" - which was completed in 1916.

Ray "Crash" Corrigan's theme and film park was a big deal in the history of Simi Valley. Portions of more than 3,200 motion pictures and television programs have been filmed there - and counting. Of note is the long row of red gum eucalyptus trees along the park's southern border - abutting the parking lot. They were planted in order to screen the filming from train traffic. When I was a child during and just after World War II, I remember that young row of eucalyptus trees, by which the cowboys chased the Indians and vice versa. The same row of eucalyptus trees appeared in many films - especially in movie serials. In those days, when you went to the movies, especially on Saturday afternoons, you saw a double feature and a serial (that help keep people coming back each Saturday). You usually got a newsreel and a cartoon, too.

The Ronald Reagan Freeway came over the pass to Kuehner Road in the early 1960's and it forms the northern border of Corriganville Park. The entertainer, Bob Hope, once owned what we now called Corriganville, and several thousand acres north of the freeway. He called his land south of the freeway "Hopetown." When the freeway was constructed over the pass, part of his agreement with CalTrans was that CalTrans would provide a way under the freeway from Hopetown so that Bob would still have direct access to his property north of the freeway. That is how the wildlife corridor came to be.

Corriganville was a movie ranch and a theme park. In the first two years of operation of Disneyland, it is reported that Corriganville drew more customers. All of that has passed. The freeway created massive, relatively sterile slopes on its south side, which reduced Corriganville's utility for the motion picture and television industries and, for that matter, its attraction as a theme park.

Overall, Corriganville is at a focal point of the evolution of transportation in the eastern Simi Valley area. Change is part of the human experience.

**The Trails:** The main entrance to the park is located at the eastern end of Smith Road. From the parking lot a trail extends from the eastern end northeast along the south side of the Arroyo Simi to the Camp Rotary picnic shelter. From there the trail extends up a switchback trail, which is the lower end of the Lower Stagecoach Trail. Off of that trail, at the top of the steep section there is an intersection with the Wildlife Corridor Trail, which extends to the north under the freeway, and from there continues generally to the northeast where it connects with the Rocky Peak Trail. A trail extends to the southwest along the north side of the Arroyo Simi past the Jungle Jim pond, at which one can cross over the old dam to the south side of the arroyo or continue on to the site of "Silvertown," once a western town set.

The Lower Stagecoach Trail continues from that intersect with the Wildlife Corridor Trail to the east and down into the canyon. Where the trail crosses over the canyon bottom; you briefly are on the original Stagecoach route. A section of the Stagecoach route has washed away over the years. However, about a thousand feet further on, travelers remain on the original route all the way to the old pass road. That route continued across the newer road and up what we now call Lilac Lane.

Another trail entrance originates from Foothill Park and extends to the southeast to a trail intersection where one can loop northeast along the north side of a rocky ridge and down to the Camp Rotary site or to the south back to old site of Silvertown and the parking lot beyond.

**Plant Life:** Nearly all of the Corriganville Park was burned in 2018. While most of the trees survived, most of the shrubs, grasses and forbes were burnt off completely. My walkover was conducted on May 8th and 9th 2020. The park was going through "plant succession." Some plants resprout from roots so that they recover by sending up new shoots immediately after a fire. Laurel sumac, sugar bush and lemonade berry do so. Most plants must wait for spring for the surviving seed bank to produce new growth. Plant life in Corriganville Park will continue to change year by year, generally maturing into a coastal sage scrub plant association. Parts of vegetation adjacent to the Wildlife Corridor Trail north of the freeway will develop into a chaparral plant association.

Plants observed as I wandered into the park from Foothill Park were: birchleaf mountain mahogany, blue elderberry, Mediterranean and black mustards, laurel sumac, red and ripgut bromes, purple nightshade, caterpillar phacelia, horehound, mugwort, wild cucumber, deerweed, popcorn flower, golden yarrow, climbing penstemon, yellow star thistle, California everlasting, California sagebrush, elegant clarkia, cobweb thistle, bush and red-bush monkeyflower, two-tone everlasting, bush mallow, chamise, Santa Susana tar plant (State "rare" list), fountain grass, wishbone bush, California buckwheat, prickly lettuce, bindweed, morning glory, sow thistle, black sage, white and yellow pincushion, dodder, poison oak, yerba santa, white and yellow sweet clovers, coast live and valley oaks, red gum, yucca, tree of heaven (hundreds of root-resprouts along the south side of the Arroyo Simi

and just east of the trail entrance at the east end of the parking lot - the stump, of the original tree is still there near the water fountain), soap plant, canyon sunflower, arroyo and dove lupines, yellow and Catalina mariposa lilies, coyote brush, Indian paint brush, toyon, blue dicks, prickly lettuce, red willow, silver puffs, slender sunflower, notable and foothill penstemons, tree tobacco, coast goldfield, cliff aster, Spanish clover, strigose lotus, giant reed, arroyo willow, Italian thistle, narrow-leaved milkweed, olive, Mexican fan palm, California Sycamore, red berry, hollyleaf cherry, Fremont cottonwood, California pepper (from Peru), white sage, mustard evening primrose, long-beaked and red-stemmed filagrees, and Turkish rugging.

**Animal Life:** Animals that may be observed in the park include mammals, such as brush and cottontail rabbits, California ground squirrel, raccoon, gray fox, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lion, a very occasional badger, Botta's pocket gopher, many types of bats, agile kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky wood rat, southern California weasel, occasionally mule deer and rarely black bear, i.e., every few years. Ringtail cats are present, but are only active two to three hours of the dead of night. However, their tracks are seen. Reptiles include the southern Pacific rattlesnake, two-striped garter snake, San Diego gopher snake, California king snake, among many other snakes, the western fence lizard and the alligator lizard. Birds include turkey vulture, red-tail and red-shouldered hawks, barn and great horned owls, California quail, common crow and raven, mourning dove, road runner, black phoebe, common flicker, mockingbird, Brewer's blackbird, scrub jay, California towhee, and the white-crowned and English sparrows, among many others.

While mountain lions are present in the hills around Simi Valley, encounters are unlikely, but you should always be alert. It is best that you do not hike alone and that you keep small children close at hand. Rattlesnakes may be encountered — Stay on the trail and avoid them when they are encountered — Be observant and never try to handle them. Do not handle any wildlife, including bats, even if they appear to be injured or sick. Remember, you are visitors to their homes.

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*Please see **Trail Safety Tips** at this trail's main page for more info.*