

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Doug Moran, BPA President

Future of Strawberry Hill

Over the past year, Strawberry Hill has been much in the news and there are several major intertwined issues and decisions pending that will affect the Barron Park neighborhood. Doug Graham's history article in this issue provides interesting background on this area.

For the purposes of this article, I will use "Strawberry Hill" to refer to the triangular area behind the Gunn High School playing fields, including both the slope and the flat area at its foot (see map on p. 6). In the various discussions of this area, the terms "triangle" and "parcel" are sometimes added.

Over the years, there have been various ideas about better utilizing this parcel, but they have died when people started looking at the details - this site presents many challenges. Consequently, it has persisted as open space dominated by invasive annuals (grasses and weeds) that needed to be mowed and plowed under in early summer to reduce the fire hazard.

Although there haven't been any significant fires recently, there have been arson fires that were large enough and close enough to have been very scary for people in the adjoining homes.

Revegetation with Native Plants

Last year, the Palo Alto Unified School District used herbicides to control the weeds, erroneously thinking that the switch made sense both economically and environmentally. This incident resurfaced the issue of better managing this parcel as open space. An informal group of residents met with the School District and discussed using native plants in the area. Replacing the existing invasive annual grasses and weeds with appropriate natives would substantially reduce the fire hazard, and could relieve the District of the need to mow/plow the parcel.

Natives would also make the area more attractive to a range of small wildlife. Multiple residents have commented to me that since the herbicide spraying, there have been far fewer birds in and around this parcel.

It was also suggested that the area could be useful for science projects by students at the nearby schools (BP, JB, Terman and Gunn), either in connection with their classes or as part of related community groups. However, we couldn't find any champions within the School District.

The School District initially seemed willing



Lupines once grew in abundance on Strawberry Hill—photo courtesy of Mary Jane Leon.

to consider a modest scale revegetation, involving native grasses, wildflowers and some small, low-growing shrubs. Their concern was that they didn't want something created that would be difficult to replace when the district eventually decided what to do with the parcel—the People's Park situation in Berkeley has been repeatedly cited.

Friends of Strawberry Hill (FOSH)

In the interim, volunteers conducted multiple work parties to remove various high-impact weeds. The group was formalized as Friends of Strawberry Hill (FOSH), with Stephanie Enos (enosfamily@yahoo.com) serving as coordinator. Although many have been involved, several deserve special mention: Winter Dellenbach for pursuing the herbicide spraying with the District; Chan Chrisman for pushing to find out what the contractor had actually

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Emily Claire Elliot



Strawberry Hill after herbicide application and stinkwort removal.

applied to the hill; and Claire Elliot for organizing weeding and exploring revegetation options.

However, no additional work has been possible. This fall we were informed of a shift of attitude within the District—their concern about avoiding anything that might conceivably interfere with future options for this parcel is dictating that nothing be done short-term.

Dirt from Football Fields

This spring, the District will be converting the football fields at both high schools to artificial turf. This will require excavating dirt from the fields to provide space for the underlying layers of the installation. Initially, they considered spreading this dirt on Strawberry Hill, but this has currently been ruled out (December 5). The District expects to be able to excavate less than earlier estimates, and be able to use this dirt to level the existing athletic fields.

Soccer Field

One of the ideas that has been floated several times is to put a regulation-sized soccer field on this parcel. Such a field would barely fit, and would require extensive recontouring of the land. It would also be uncomfortably close to the houses on McGregor Way and El Cerrito Road.

District fields are used by more than just the school's athletic programs: They are managed by the City's Parks Department

and rented (nominal fees) to a variety of leagues. One concern is that the players and spectators would use McGregor and Ilima Way for parking because it is much more convenient than Gunn's parking lots.

The status of this idea is very hard to pin down—you get very different stories from different portions of the District. Some say it is

simply on a list of sites to be evaluated for suitability, others say that the conversion is a virtual certainty that is likely to happen as soon as funds become available, although this could be 3–5 years hence.

School District Politics

I don't have children in the schools and thus have limited experience with District politics. However, I have learned that the School District should not be viewed as a monolithic organization, but rather as many different factions. I have heard the individual schools described as virtual fiefdoms (of the principal).

For example, the dumping of the B4E construction debris on Strawberry Hill was done by the central staff without consultation with the Gunn administration, which was both surprised and angry about what transpired: The trucks did substantial damage to the athletic fields (especially the drainage and irrigation systems).

Some portions of the District's management will listen to public concerns, but other portions are openly dismissive of them, viewing "It's for the children" as ample justification for their decisions. My observation has been that these attitudes are as much an attribute of the individual as where s/he is in the organization. For example, a noticeable shift in priorities followed the retirement of District Chief Business Officer Jerry Matranga.

The District's inertia on this parcel is very understandable. The proposals to allow volunteers to improve the parcel as open space have no bearing on the District's core missions (educating students and organized youth athletics), and in such cases, inaction is almost always the safest bureaucratic choice. Although people have pointed out a range of potential educational uses for this area, this carries little weight until there is a "champion" within the District hierarchy willing to turn it into an actual use.

Ownership

Since Strawberry Hill seems to be a difficult parcel for the School District to use effectively, there have been questions about whether it could be transferred to the City (through a sale or swap). The ownership status of the Gunn property is not simple. My best information is that it was formerly owned by Stanford and sold to the School District for a token price, with



Doug Moran and Stephanie Enos go to work removing stinkwort weeds.

Emily Claire Elliot

the provision that if the District ceased to use it for educational purposes, the land would revert to Stanford ownership.

The relationship between the District and the City is also a complex one, with the City paying for maintenance of various facilities (such as playing fields).

Future

In an area where there is a shortage of open space, it is frustrating to see a parcel such as Strawberry Hill relegated to being simply given over to invasive plants. However, my sense is that it will take stronger community demand to overcome the District's current inertia.

The current superintendent—Kevin Skelly (also a Barron Park resident)—has given assurances that the public will be given “time to weigh in on the matter,” but does not see anything happening in the near-term because “the district has more pressing facility improvement priorities.”

However, large organizations can proceed in directions contrary to the best intentions and directions of their leaders. And the School District has poor history of informing neighbors of relevant developments. Although a substantial majority of the households in Palo Alto do not have children in public schools, people in the School District tend to forget this and assume that the PTAs provide adequate community outreach. Aside: The current administration at Gunn has broken this pattern and is sending notifications to the adjoining neighborhood associations for distribution to their email lists.

THE BARRON PARK BUSINESS BEAT

By Sue Luttner



Friend, customer, and Barron Park neighbor Chan Chrisman serenaded Jim Davis, to honor his 25 years of running our neighborhood service station.

Thanks for the party, Jim Davis, and for 25 years of service.

With catering from the Driftwood Market and aerial displays by our own Balloon Lady, Jim Davis threw us a party at his Valero station in November, to celebrate his 25th anniversary at 3972 El Camino. If you add in his 11 years as a mechanic at the Shell station across the street, Jim has served the neighborhood for 36 years now.

Barron Park was “really neat in the early ‘70s,” Jim recalls, with vacant lots, a placid feel and “our own little fire department.” He still thinks it’s a special place, “a little community inside a city.” He says he wanted to thank the neighborhood, because even after 25 years of running the station, “every day is still fun.”

SUNDAY FAMILY SOCCER NIGHT AT BOL PARK!



A year or so ago, a small group of Barron Park soccer families got together at Bol Park on a Sunday afternoon for an impromptu soccer night

with the kids vs. the dads. With some picnic baskets in the background, this group continued to get together. You would mostly hear French being spoken as many of the families were from France, but as the group grew, it became a popular Sunday afternoon get-together to finish the week.

It has now become an event and you can count on a fun time that the whole family can enjoy and get a little exercise as well. If you are interested in a rousing match of soccer, just show up any Sunday, weather permitting, a couple hours before dark, listen for some French and you are there!



Chimalus Neighbors Get Results

The persistence of a group of Chimalus and Tippawingo residents concerned about toxic chemical use just over their back fences is again about to pay off. On November 9, the president of CPI (Communications and Power Industries at 811 Hansen Way) announced that his company would install a continuous gas monitoring system that would set off alarms in the event of a toxic gas release at its plating shop and chemical storage areas. CPI also announced that it had reduced the amounts of nitric acid and potassium cyanide stored on site at any one time by 40 to 45 percent. Residents had been pushing for these changes and thank CPI for committing resources to them.

A previous effort spearheaded by the residents resulted in the City modifying the zoning ordinance (see Barron Park Newsletter article: www.cyberstars.com/bpa/artliberman.html or CPIHazardwatch.org) to require a buffer between hazardous material sites like CPI and residential properties.

Toxic Gas Release Galvanizes Group

The Chimalus and Tippawingo residents banded together after a February 2006 accident which allowed toxic vapors to escape and drift into Barron Park. Nearby residents received no warning and many were unaware of the amount of toxic chemicals that were being used and stored by CPI. There were no reported injuries, but the incident put the neighborhood on high alert.

A subsequent investigation by the Fire Department showed that CPI was neither prepared nor equipped for a toxic gas release and did not respond properly. They opened their windows and doors, alerted their employees, but did not consider warning the nearby residents, some of whom live only 70 feet from the rear of the building where CPI's hazardous material operations are conducted. Also, CPI did not contact the Fire Department. CPI was eventually fined \$20,000 for mishandling the toxic gas release.

In the Spring of 2007, Chimalus residents began meeting regularly with Assistant City Manager Emily Harrison, Fire Mar-

shal Dan Firth and CPI officials to address neighborhood concerns.

Gas Monitoring System a Significant First Step

Chimalus and Tippawingo residents began pressing for the continuous toxic gas monitoring system immediately after the accident in 2006. When nothing happened, they asked the Fire Department which said the Fire Code did not require CPI to install it. So, the residents proposed amendments to the City of Palo Alto's Fire Code. CPI announced its plan to voluntarily install the equipment shortly before the City Council was scheduled to consider these amendments. CPI's decision has put the need for code amendments on hold. There is currently no timeline for installing the system, but CPI President Bob Fickett has promised to move ahead without delay.

Installing the continuous gas monitoring system is but the first step in creating an emergency alerting system: Interpreting the readings from those sensors is not straightforward. CPI and the Fire Department will need to identify the range of possible situations and the appropriate responses, including when to alert neighbors and what to tell them about protective measures to be taken. CPI will be able to directly activate the City's alerting system. While many details remain to be worked out, CPI and the City staff have said this is now their objective and they will follow through.

Amount of Toxics on Site Reduced

At the time of the toxic gas release, the amounts of nitric acid and potassium cyanide on the CPI site significantly exceeded the threshold for which the State requires special review and monitoring, called "Title 19 thresholds." This includes community notification and preparation of Risk Management Plans. Early this year, the City Council passed a motion urging CPI to reduce the amounts below Title 19 thresholds as soon as possible.

CPI has made reductions through more efficient inventory control, smaller deliveries and reduction in the size of some plating tank baths. Although the reductions

are good news for neighbors, residents continue to seek further reductions in CPI's inventories of these hazardous materials to bring them below the Title 19 thresholds. Mr. Fickett said he did not think CPI could reach this goal. For example, the Title 19 threshold for potassium cyanide is 100 lbs, but CPI typically has several times that amount in active use (in plating baths) and sometimes as much as that in a storage building that is even closer to some Chimalus residences.

Next Steps

CPI has spent considerable time and money on improving its operations since the 2006 toxic gas release. Mr. Fickett stated that besides reducing the amount of toxics stored on site (which required changing vendors), researching monitoring systems and outsourcing the plating of some larger parts, they are continuing to look at processes and material alternatives for silver plating.

While not wanting to diminish what CPI has done, and recognizing the extra costs they have incurred, the Chimalus and Tippawingo residents think CPI can—and must—go farther and reduce or even eliminate cyanide on their site. They also feel strongly that CPI should move its storage building. Residents believe it is a question of CPI committing the time and resources to find other materials, other processes, change product design, work with customers and vendors, outsource, etc.

The next step is harder, but residents feel CPI can be creative and resourceful, and if it wishes to be a truly good neighbor, further significantly reduce their amounts of hazardous materials. Ultimately, however, residents believe the only completely satisfactory solution will be for CPI to phase out its hazardous materials operations on Hansen Way, whether it is voluntarily or through zoning changes that require the operation to eventually be terminated altogether.

Primary authors of this article are Art Liberman and Jeff Dean. Other residents who have been working on the issue are Samir Tuma and Romala Georgia. For more information, see their web site at: CPIHazardWatch.org

ANNUAL WELCOMING PARTY

Our fifth welcoming party in Bol Park was a great success. Newcomers joined longer-term residents to meet one another, enjoy free ice cream donated by Steve's Driftwood Market, play games, and pet dogs and the donkeys. A good time was had by all!



Sue Luttner

Annika Duan found a festive spot among the balloons.



Sue Luttner

Katrin Richter says daughters Isabella and Julie consider Perry and Niner part of the family.



Sue Luttner

Jena Rauti and Gary Breitbard brought out their accordions.



Sue Luttner

BPA president Doug Moran welcomed An Laurent and daughter Manon, who'd moved here from Belgium just two and a half weeks before the party.

THE STORY OF STRAWBERRY HILL

By Douglas Graham, Barron Park Historian

An Image and the Reality

Strawberry Hill—the very name evokes images of a lush and fruitful place of summer warmth and easy airs laden with the tangy scent of luscious ripe berries. It sounds like a place where you could lie in soft grass and reach your hand out to pluck sweet morsels warmed by the sun and bursting with juicy goodness. Such a place exists in Barron Park?

Well...by courtesy of name only. Today's Strawberry Hill (see the accompanying map) is a small grassy knoll with a thin covering of grasses and forbs (leafy, non-woody flowering plants), many of them non-native, some of which are invasive weeds that tend to crowd out native plants, including some endangered species. None of them bear crops of large, tasty berries.

The hill's northern face is scored by several curving, unplanned paths developed by the feet of humans (mostly children) who have enjoying the open space, the low-angle but extensive views from its 40-foot high summit and the freedom to run or

ride a dirt bike down the hill. There is a bench at the top for those who prefer quiet contemplation. The regional bike path through Bol Park passes over the summit before dropping down a slight grade to the sedimentation basin on Barron Creek at Gunn High School.

How Did the Hill Get Its Name?

The naming of Strawberry Hill has not been recorded for history. Perhaps there were some wild strawberry plants in the grass in the early days. Or perhaps this is a reference to the nearby Strawberry fields in the Barron park area in the 1920s. It may have been named by a kid—perhaps a Barron Park kid roaming the undeveloped land after the cattle who grazed there were excluded from their pasture when the land was transferred from Stanford control to that of the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD). This would not have occurred until the early 1960s, when Gunn High School was built (it opened in 1964).

When Did It Become Public Open Space?

Prior to the late 1950s, and going all the way back to the very early 1800s, the land was cattle or sheep range, and kids or adult trespassers must have been unwelcome. The boundary between Mayfield Farm (now Barron Park) and the land that was later acquired by Governor Stanford was probably fenced by Sarah Wallis who owned the farm from 1856 to 1878, or by Edward Barron, who bought it in the latter year. The land on both sides of the fence was private and used for agricultural purposes. By the 1930s at the latest, it was pasture for the dairy cows belonging to the "Portuguese Farmer" who ran cows for Piers' Dairy and lived by Matadero Creek where the VA Hospital Laundry Plant is now. It did not become public access open space until 1964 when the high school opened.

What is "The Triangle"?

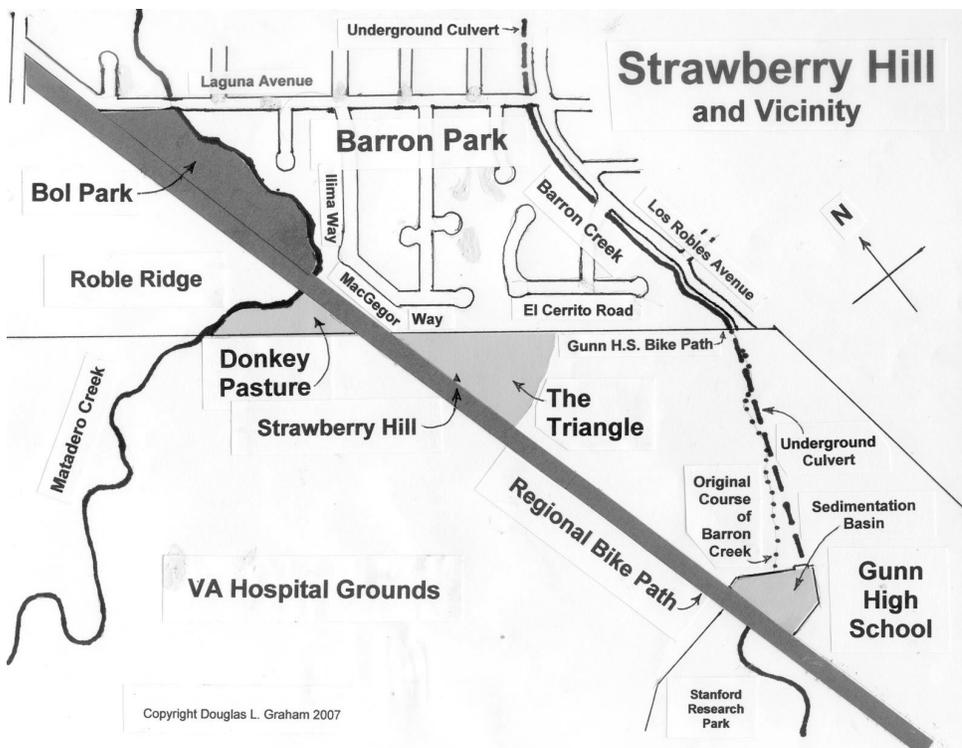
Along with the hill comes a narrow strip of flat land, sometimes a little soggy in winter, along the Gunn Bike Path that runs in back of the houses along McGregor Way and El Cerrito road. The two together have often been referred to as "The Triangle", due to their overall shape on the map. This is the usage I will follow in this article.

How Do You Get There?

The Triangle is easily accessed on foot from McGregor Way via a public walking access through a private driveway where Paradise Way intersects with McGregor, or from the Gunn High School Bike Path which runs along the north side, or from the Regional Bike Path that runs through Bol Park on the southwest side, or from the Gunn High School playing fields on the east. The first two boundaries are precisely drawn, but not the eastern one.

Why Isn't Strawberry Hill Part of Bol Park?

The entire Triangle was proposed to be part of a future "Phase Three" expansion of Bol Park at the time that the BPA proposed and organized the acquisition of the former Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) right-of-way in 1974 to enable the develop-



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ment of “Phase Two”, which was the Regional Bike Path. Other parcels considered at that time for a Phase Three included the present Donkey Pasture, which was still owned by the Bol Family and inhabited by Mickey (1967–1998). However, by the time Phase Two was completed and dedicated in 1980, the leaders who had begun the drive to create and expand the park (1967–1979) were tired out. The BPA had other land use issues to deal with at that time, especially along El Camino Real, and the Phase Three park expansion never got started.

So, Who Owns Strawberry Hill?

This is a simple question with a complex answer. Stanford, by the terms of the grant of land from the Stanford Family to the University in the 1880s, is not allowed to sell any of the land. The trustees have gotten around that by leasing land to private homeowners (faculty housing on campus), industrial companies (Stanford Research Park), and retail stores (Stanford Shopping Center). However, School Districts aren’t allowed to build on leased land, so the PAUSD could not follow these examples. Both sides wanted to see the school built, and Stanford eventually bent the grant restrictions a little more by selling the land to the PAUSD, with a reversion clause restricting the district from re-selling to any party other than Stanford University. Thus Stanford kept their cake and PAUSD got to eat it too.

Strawberry Hill’s Physical History

What did Strawberry Hill look like before the late 1950s? While we don’t have any photo that focuses directly on the little knoll itself, we do have several that show the land immediately around it. One example is the accompanying photograph of the present-day VA Hospital lands in the 1930s, taken from Roble Ridge. Strawberry Hill would be just out of view to the left—the bigger hill in the background is Coyote Hill in the Stanford Research Park. The top of Coyote Hill has been left undeveloped and still looks much the same today except that there now are more and bigger trees. The other photo, of the SPRR steam engine pulling a morning commute train nearly entering Barron Park from the Los Altos direction, shows some of the land now occupied by the Gunn High School playing



SP Commuter Train near the present-day Donkey Pasture.

fields, and Strawberry Hill is just out view to the right.

There Were Two Knolls

The original landscape actually contained two knolls, which are clearly shown on the 1895 USGS Topographic map of the Palo Alto-Mountain View area, and on the 1908 survey of Stanford Lands. The bigger of the two was Strawberry Hill. In 1900, the hill may have looked like Roble Ridge in Barron Park, which was larger and a little higher but basically very similar. The Ridge was covered by an oak savanna (grassland with widely spaced trees). It was studded with very large “Robles” (deciduous Valley Oaks). It also had Coast Live Oak and California Buckeye, especially along the two creeks. The knolls doubtless had originally been covered by native California bunch grasses of several species, as well as native forbs and vines such as Poison Oak. There were probably many wildflowers in the springtime. However, after nearly 100 years of grazing by large herds of cattle, the natives would have been largely replaced by European and Asian annual grasses and invasive weeds. This was the situation when the railroad came through.

Split by the Railroad

In 1905–06, the Southern Pacific carved a new right-of-way (ROW) through the Stanford lands and Mayfield Farm, as well as many other private properties. This was for a new “fast cut-off” to run from the main line at Mayfield (today’s California Avenue commercial section) to Los Gatos and through the mountains to Santa Cruz and

Watsonville, tying back into the main line near Castroville and on to Salinas. It was supposed to be a short cut to Los Angeles and was constructed at enormous expense with multiple tunnels through the Santa Cruz Mountains (several of which collapsed in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake).

Our portion of the right-of-way (ROW) required a big cut right through the north flank of the larger knoll (Strawberry Hill) and the south flank of the lesser knoll. The smaller hill was damaged less: most of it was between the ROW and Barron Park. Establishing a smooth railroad grade also required large fills in the stretches between Strawberry Hill and each Creek. The knolls didn’t provide enough fill for this, so trains brought rubble from the earthquake damage in the city and dumped it to build up the grade foundation. From 1907 until about 1957, the trains ran and the cows grazed and the damaged knolls were generally ignored by the local humans.

Strawberry Hill Sacrificed for a Golf Course

In the mid-1950s, the Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans’ Affairs) decided to take a big chunk of the Stanford Lands for a new Veterans’ Hospital. Construction was completed in 1957. The VA parcel contained the summit and the majority of the mass of Strawberry Hill. The VA decided to remove their portion of the knoll entirely and use the soil to fill a low, damp area to build a short golf course. When this was finished, the main part of the original Strawberry Hill had disappeared.

Abandonment of the Railroad

About late 1964 the SPRR was allowed to abandon the “Los Gatos Branch” and the tracks were torn up, allowing the state to build Foothill Expressway. The tracks past Gunn High School and through Barron Park may have been torn up a little later, because there was no hurry. However, this action was one of the factors that spurred the BPA to hurry on their idea of converting the “Donkey Pasture” into Bol Park. A quick look at the map showed everyone that the old railroad ROW would make a fine, straight, high-speed street connecting Foothill Expressway with El Camino Real (where the McDonald’s Restaurant is today). It was in the BPA’s leaders’ minds to minimize the likelihood of this possible intrusion into the quiet of our neighborhood by engineering the removal of the Bol land from the housing market. This was what the Bol Family wanted also, and they offered a below-market price for the key acreage that became the core of the new park, dedicated to Cornelis Bol.

The Sister Gets Bulldozed to Fill in Barron Creek

While this was all getting sorted out, Gunn High School was being designed and built. Barron Creek then cut across the middle of the Gunn parcel, running only in the wet season but presenting an obstacle in the form of a channel about six or eight feet deep, lined with Oaks and Buckeye. The PAUSD decided to build a five-foot underground culvert pipe to carry the creek water from a new sedimentation basin to be built next to the railroad down to the next stretch of open channel in the Barron Park neighborhood at the upper end of Los Robles Avenue. The pipe excavation and sedimentation basin would not supply enough fill, however, so they decided to level the smaller knoll, sister to Strawberry Hill, and use it to fill in the natural Barron Creek channel. We don’t have a photograph of this hill, either, but it must have had some scenic value, because the El Cerrito Road area (Tracts 242 in 1945 and 522 in 1948) were named for it – El Cerrito translates from the Spanish as “Little Hill”. At that time you could view the knoll easily from the El Cerrito Road properties.

Land Mutilation

The way this land was treated makes me think of the old warnings you used to see on the IBM punch cards that were used for data processing before the advent of integrated-circuit computers. Each card had a printed warning not to “staple, spindle or otherwise mutilate.” After a century and a quarter of overgrazing, exotic species introduction, cutting and filling and leveling, there probably wasn’t an awful lot of “natural value” left to the land. However, the natural environment does have a lot of resilience, and native species have a way of creeping back in if you stop the abuse for a while.

And this happened, to a certain degree. Between 1964 and 1978, the sundered sections of the northern flank of Strawberry Hill and the rest of the Triangle were left alone. It became de facto public open space. These were the years when the neighborhood kids first explored the hill and beat trails through the grass, like the ones that exist today. It may have been during this period that the hill was named. Along the abandoned ROW, native species such as coyote bush, poison oak and California poppies slowly re-established themselves, in some spots even overcoming the sterility of the graveled, oiled and creosoted roadbed. Neighborhood residents, VA patients and adventuresome types from the research park beat a fairly decent footpath along the ROW, good enough that even bicyclists used some short stretches of it.

Reconstructive Surgery

The wheel of history turns, and attitudes towards “wastelands” change, sometimes rapidly. By 1974 when the BPA leaders arranged the hiring of landscape architects (and Barron Park residents) Ken Arutunian and Jack Buktenica to design Phase Two of Bol Park—the Regional Bike Path—attitudes towards the land had changed considerably. The value of conserving the remnants of natural and semi-natural environment was becoming widely accepted. When the park planning group met with the architects, one of the key concepts to emerge from the planning was a plan to reshape the contours of the land, insofar as would be feasible, to mimic the original shape of the land before the railroad was put through.

To achieve this, an enormous amount of grading was done during 1978, during which some surprising discoveries were made. Some interesting but damaged artifacts from San Francisco were turned up in the railroad fill areas that were being removed to provide material to repair the big gash in the middle of Strawberry Hill. Some Indian artifacts were also discovered nearby (not at Strawberry Hill).

Little Cosmetic Enhancement

However, there was little money available for landscaping along the new bike path. Other than some wildflower seeding at first (a beautiful display of poppies in 1980 and 1981), there was little planting and most of it failed. The new bike path was beautifully designed but the recovering vegetation along the edges was ragged and weedy looking in many spots.

The Flood Control Project

However, we couldn’t leave Strawberry Hill alone long enough for the above-mentioned natural processes to produce a more pleasing landscape. In 1983 Barron Park was hit by flooding after both creeks overbanked during the night of January 25–26 when about six or eight inches of rain fell, mostly between 10 PM and 3 AM. At least 24 streets were affected, with 90 acres being flooded at least 6 inches deep. In a survey, 90 homes and 130 garages were flooded (these were voluntary responses – there were probably many more unreported). This led eventually to the design and construction of the present Barron Creek Diversion and Matadero Creek Bypass structures, which take excess flows and route them around the neighborhood, while allowing low and moderate flows to continue down the semi-natural open channels. This would protect Barron Park against the 1% probability design flow—commonly known as the “100-year flood”.

New Mutilation

The Matadero Bypass is a 12X12 foot box culvert and the Barron Creek diversion is 6X8 feet. The only reasonable place to put this large underground system was underneath the bike path from the Barron Creek Sedimentation Basin to Matadero Creek, then on to the Research Park, where it took a half-right turn and ran down a previously-acquired right-of-way between the houses on the northwest side of Chimalus

Avenue and the Research Park. This meant tearing up Strawberry Hill again to make room for the Barron Creek Diversion. The cut had to be made even deeper than the railroad cut had been. The trains could labor up a gentle grade on either side of the hill and coast down the other side, but water only flows downhill. So, in 1994, Strawberry hill had to be ripped open again.

Shape Enhancement Surgery

After the construction was done, the contractors were required to return the project right-of-way to park condition. One of the specifications in the contract called for recontouring the bike path to approximately the same configuration that had been built in 1979. Because of the size of the channels to be buried, the project generated much more fill than the railroad project had generated and imported. What to do with it? One option was to haul it away to a landfill, but this would have entailed many weeks worth of additional large-scale truck hauling through our neighborhood, which was already sick to death of the noise, dust, mud and general mess of project. So the BPA agreed that the extra dirt could be added to Strawberry Hill. Obviously it could not be added to the height of the hill and still maintain the original grades specified for the bike path. So it was added to the northern slope of the hill, between the "original" knoll and the Gunn high School bike path. When this process was complete, the shape of the hill had changed from a narrow ridge with a steep northern face to an almost round, flat-topped hill with a gentler northern slope. The "foot-print" of the hill on the Barron Park side was probably about doubled.

At the time of the decision, it was known that PAUSD had no money for vegetating this new slope with native plants. It could not be covered by the Water District in the flood control project revegetation budget because it was on PAUSD property. Somehow, a small amount of funding was found to spread some grass seed, which then had a hard time getting established on the soil, which was a mixture of topsoil, subsoils from various locations, railroad grading gravel and earthquake debris.

The Law of Unintended Consequences



View towards the mountains from Roble Ridge in the 1930s.

As with many complex decisions, in the chosen solution were hidden at least two important but unintended negative consequences. First, the relatively loose soil of the new slope was vulnerable to rapid erosion, and the following winter, 1994-95 was a very wet one. The disturbed soil was soon saturated and the runoff became charged with large amounts of mud. During the extensive grading of the flood control project, inadequate attention had been given to the need of proper drainage from The Triangle into Matadero Creek. The original drain was damaged or plugged, and mud-laden water pooled in the triangle. During one particularly intense down-pour, the mud began flowing through the properties along McGregor Way and into the street, where it eventually passed into the storm drains and reached Matadero Creek lower down. At least one swimming pool was partially filled with mud during this episode. This problem got some attention from PAUSD and the Water District during 1996 and 1997, and the drainage was slightly improved but not brought back to the pre-project level.

Secondly, a more subtle problem developed in the PAUSD staff. Apparently the idea became fixed that the Triangle was available for dumping any unwanted dirt. This soon escalated to become dumping of

construction debris from other school sites. There was a lot of renovation and construction activity throughout the district in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the PAUSD bond issue money became available for deferred maintenance and emergency construction projects under the aegis of "Building for Excellence." Soon, large trucks began appearing, driving down the Gunn High School bike path and dumping mounds of debris in several areas of the triangle. This was apparently done without notice to anyone at Gunn and the trucks did a great deal of damage to the bike path, the lawn along it and to the underground sprinkling system. Not all of this damage has been repaired yet. When protests were made, it was revealed that the staff attitude at PAUSD headquarters was (at first) one of surprise that anyone else thought they had the right to question what PAUSD did with its own debris "on its own property." This, I believe, was the second and potentially more damaging unintended consequence of our agreeing to the disposal of the flood control dirt on Strawberry Hill in 1995. I believe that some members of the district staff began to look upon the Gunn Triangle as their own convenient landfill that did not have to follow environmental regulations or consideration for the neighbors.

Other Threats to Strawberry Hill

Various people have had their eyes on the Triangle for various uses. In the early 1990s, a trial balloon was sent up by a prominent Trustee to develop the land for teacher housing, some of it to be below-market. The BPA reacted instantly and I headed a small group circulating a petition protesting the idea. We collected more than 200 names in less than three days, and presented them at the Board Meeting where the idea had been hastily agendized. That ended that particular threat before it had time to gain widespread support. Other ideas for intensive development of this relatively small piece of land have been broached from time to time since then, but negative reactions from the BPA and individual neighbors have been enough to discourage each one.

A Soccer Field in the Triangle?

About two years ago, a new threat appeared, which keeps resurfacing in different forums and seems to be gathering support from various groups. It is a proposal to build a soccer field in the level part of the triangle. I suspect that many of the supporters of this idea are not very familiar with the Triangle and do not realize how much its width was narrowed by the 1995 enlargement of Strawberry Hill. At least one neighbor has estimated that the only way to put a soccer field in the Triangle would be to eliminate the bike path, cut down all the trees, put the soccer field up against the fence and probably even then have to carve into Strawberry Hill and build a large retaining wall to hold back the dirt. This concern has not been thoroughly analyzed, so nobody is ready to state conclusively that a soccer field won't fit there, but it seems unlikely to me.

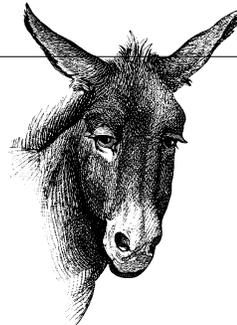
But that's only part of the neighbors' concern. Ilima Way, McGregor Way and Paradise Way form an unusually quiet neighborhood which could and probably would be radically transformed if a soccer field were established over our back fences. Where would all the players and spectators park? It would probably prove impossible to force them to park in the Gunn High School parking lot, which is located more than one-quarter mile from the proposed playing field. So they would park on our streets.

Please Read Doug Moran's "President's Message"

For more information about recent threats, please read Doug Moran's message in this newsletter about a group called "Friends of Strawberry Hill" (FOSH) which have been slowly revegetating areas along the

Regional Bike Path, including parts of Strawberry Hill. If you love Strawberry Hill and enjoy the public access to it and the Triangle, please lend your support to saving it and keeping it in the public domain as a Community Open Space Resource and safe harbor for native plant species.

Help Support the Barron Park Donkeys!



Support for Perry and Niner comes completely from the generosity of their neighbors and the community. The donkeys receive no tax dollars, no government funds, no funds from the City of Palo Alto, no grants from any animal welfare or humane organization. They are a part of the neighborhood simply because people who live here care about them and care about continuing this unique opportunity. In return, Perry and Niner provide warmth and joy to those who walk by their pasture; a rural equine experience for suburban children and adults who visit them on Sundays in Bol Park; an opportunity for humane education for children in Barron Park Schools; and a general reaffirmation for all of us of our connection to the natural world.

General farrier and veterinary expenses for the donkeys total about \$1,000 a year. Food costs about \$600 a year. Funds for the donkeys are managed by Acterra (formerly the Peninsula Conservation Center Foundation), which acts as fiscal agent for the Donkey Project, providing insurance

and handling donations and financial affairs. Fees for these administrative services totaled about \$200 this past year. All of these expenses are funded solely through donations.

All those who care about Perry and Niner seek to guarantee their proper on-going care and shelter, as well as to ensure that assets will be available for health concerns as the donkeys age. The handlers hope that those generous neighbors who have contributed in the past will consider increasing their support this year. Contributions for the donkeys' care may be sent to: The Palo Alto Donkey Project, ACTERRA (Action for a Sustainable Earth), 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303-4303. The check *must* be made out to "ACTERRA—Palo Alto Donkey Fund." All of the above *must* be included.

For further information about making a contribution on behalf of the donkeys, or if you would like information about how to become one of the volunteer donkey handlers, please call Bob Frost, 493-8272 or email at bobfrost34@yahoo.com.

The 2008 Barron Park Donkey Calendars are here!

Calendars make great gifts and these help support our neighborhood donkeys. 100% of proceeds will be donated to the Palo Alto Donkey Project to help keep Perry and Niner a happy and healthy part of Barron Park.

Calendars are \$15 each (tax deductible)

and feature photos of Mickey, Perry and Niner as well as original watercolors by neighborhood artist Edith Smith. Quantities are limited, though.

For calendar, please contact Linnie Melena (Linnie.Melena@gmail.com).

Membership Report

By Linda Elder, Chair

Happy Holidays to all our members! Many thanks to every household and business member for your generous support. At our membership level, we are an impressive 445 memberships strong! Yeah for us!

But as mentioned in the last newsletter, at our leadership level, we are struggling with a too-small Board of Directors with too many vacancies in committees and ongoing activities.

I struggle myself, with the everyday demands of work and family, let alone trying to make a little time for myself. I think the reason I got involved in the BPA is that I hoped it would help to nurture that strong sense of place called Barron Park. Everyone who lives here feels it. It's something that seems to be hard to come by these days. I suspect that's why our membership is so strong. We desire a sense of community—neighborhood donkeys, a lovely spring May Fete, and a visible and vocal neighborhood association, that's there when you need them. I hope we will be, this year and in the years to come. Happy New Year!

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Barron Park Association
724 Barron Avenue
Palo Alto, California 94306

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Annual Meeting Set for February 10

The Barron Park Association annual meeting has been set for Sunday, February 10, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Barron Park School multi-purpose room. The featured event will be a presentation on the City's plans for the library and public safety buildings. This presentation is part of a City information program, at the end of which the City may consider a finance measure. Residents may be asked to vote on the measure if it is a bond issue. The speakers will include a community member and a City staff person.

Barron Park Association TREASURERS

John King has graciously accepted the position of treasurer of the BPA. Thank you, John.

Mary Jane Leon, past treasurer, volunteered to write the Seniors Column in the newsletter when the late Katie Edwards resigned from the Board in summer 1999. She did that for one year, then was invited to join the Board in the summer of 2000. She proofread the newsletter from day one—also edited one issue when the editor was ill. She established Seniors Lunches, which still happen six times a year. She served as BPA Treasurer from spring 2003 to present.

Mary Jane says she's "leaving the Board with regret, but also with many good memories. The Barron Park Association is an unusually active and valuable neighborhood organization. I wish it, and all the Board members, continued successes."

Thank you Mary Jane.

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION

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Christian Kalar, Vice President

Vacant, Secretary

John King, Treasurer

Linda Elder

Nancy Hamilton

Lydia Kou

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May Fete: Vacant

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Seniors: Vacant

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Welcoming: Gwen Luce

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BPA meetings are held the 3rd

Tuesday of most months at 7:15 p.m.

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