

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Interpretation and education increases public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of natural, cultural, and recreational values. Providing experiences that are both meaningful and inspiring is one of the Department of Parks and Recreation's core program initiatives. The educational and interpretive programs and facilities within Topanga State Park aim to connect visitors with the Park's significant resources.

Interpretive Facilities

The Park's 1977 *General Development Plan* proposed five major interpretive facilities and additional support facilities in seven distinct areas of the Park:

- **Yoba**¹ – a nature interpretive center with reference collection of flora and fauna; and, an American Indian Center with cultural groups interpreted through archaeological sites, artisan displays, and examples of Native American structures.
- **Rustic Canyon** – a center for historic and environmental interpretation; and, an educational farm with crops and animals.
- **Los Liones** – a major public contact facility for orientation to the entire Park, plus a botanical garden and arboretum emphasizing native plants.
- **Lower Topanga Canyon** – special interpretive and trailhead orientation facilities.
- **Mulholland** – interpretive facilities will be provided at the intersection of Fire Road 30 and Mulholland Highway, an important access link to recreation and open space areas within the Park from the San Fernando Valley.
- **Eagle Spring** – interpretive facilities near a trail camp to serve both the hiker and the equestrian using the Backbone Trail.
- **Upper Topanga** – a proposed group camp area less than ½ mile north of the Yoba area will provide interpretive facilities.

Currently, interpretive facilities are located in three areas within Topanga State Park: Trippet Ranch (the center of park operations), Hub Junction (in Upper Topanga), and Los Liones Canyon (near the southern end of the Park). The Trippet Ranch Nature Center has featured natural history-based exhibits for at least two decades. The Nature Center is currently closed, interpretive collections are in storage, and the nearby outdoor exhibits have been removed as part of a State-funded Public Use Improvement project at the Park. The project will also fund interpretive panels at Hub Junction to replace existing wayside exhibits. Another interpretive facility, a small amphitheater, is located at Los Liones Canyon. The Public Use Improvement project will add a native plant garden and interpretive panels to this site.

Interpretive Collections

The Park's interpretive collections are comprised of two primary types of materials: Archaeological Objects and Natural History Specimens. The latter includes several mounted animals, a variety of bird nests and eggs, geological objects, and insect specimens. These collections are expected to be returned to display in the Nature Center

¹ The Park's 1977 *General Development Plan* noted that Yoba is an "Indian word meaning 'ceremonial enclosure'." This area appears to be located at – or near – what is today referred to as Trippet Ranch.

as part of the Public Use Improvement project. The Archaeological Objects are associated with Park excavations and isolated finds dating to 2003. These objects reflect both pre-historic and historic periods of the Park and, with very few exceptions, are in storage. Two non-State Parks repositories (UCLA and UC Berkeley) hold important archaeological collections associated with the Park. These collections are significant as they contain objects associated with CA-LAN-1 and 2, the first archaeological sites recorded in Los Angeles County under the official state trinomial system.

Support for Interpretation

Topanga State Park Rangers and Seasonal Park Aids have interpretation as part of their regular duties. A District Interpretive Specialist provides interpretive guidance and assistance to the various State Parks in the Los Angeles area, including Topanga State Park. There is no interpreter position assigned specifically to the Park. The Topanga Canyon Docents (TCD) are a dedicated group of volunteers, staffing the nature center, leading nature hikes, and conducting school programs since 1974. Additionally, TCD has been coordinating the 10-week docent training program for 35 years. The Temescal Canyon Association is another dedicated group of volunteers, leading nature hikes from Los Liones and nearby trailheads, and providing funds for the Topanga State Park map.

Interpretive Programs

The Park's presented and self-guiding interpretive programs are mostly held at Trippet Ranch. School programs are offered on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, October through May. The program has been designed for children in grades 2 through 5. Free guided nature walks are offered on Sundays from January through the end of June. Both of these programs are led by the Topanga Canyon Docents. Roving interpretation is conducted primarily by Park Rangers. Topics frequently addressed are the park's plants and wildlife, fire and safety issues, size of the park, and the job of a park ranger.

In addition to the self-guiding exhibits in the Trippet Ranch Nature Center (temporarily closed for exhibit renovations), the park has two self-guiding interpretive programs. The Trippet Ranch Nature Trail is approximately one mile long and begins just east of the Park Office (near the parking lot and picnic areas). The trail passes through open grassland, shaded oak woodland, and onto chaparral-covered slopes overlooking the ocean. An accompanying brochure, 'Trippet Ranch Self-Guided Nature Trail' is available at the start of the trail. A Native Tree/Plant Garden is located near the Park Office. This row of native plants has small signs identifying the various species.

Programs Provided by Others/Partnerships

Programs are also presented at Topanga State Park by others, including monthly bird walks led by the Sierra Club and Los Angeles Audubon Society. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) provide school programs at the Temescal Canyon entrance to the park. MRCA also assists with transportation to parks (including trips to Topanga SP) through its Recreational Transit Program (RTP). The Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCD) is another important program provider, bringing an average of 12 school groups to Trippet Ranch each year. An effort to coordinate program and planning in the Santa Monica Mountains

National Recreation Area has recently begun under the auspices of the Santa Monica Mountains Education Consortium. Members of this consortium include California State Parks, National Park Service, Topanga Canyon Docents, MRCA, and RCD.

Special Events

Special events with some or potential interpretation include the John Muir Birthday Hike in April. Multiple groups of visitors hike through the park's various trails, culminating with a birthday cake celebration at Trippet Ranch. Backbone Festival Hikes are held over a multi-weekend schedule, led by the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter to cover the entire 70-mile Santa Monica Mountains Backbone Trail. Two cross-country footraces have become traditions in the park – the Tough Topanga 10K occurs on Memorial Day Weekend and the Turkey Trot is held the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Printed or Electronic Interpretive Material

Visitors may obtain information prior to arriving at the park by visiting the California State Parks website (www.parks.ca.gov), then following the 'Visit a Park' link to Topanga State Park. A description of the park and information on its many trails, including the popular Eagle Rock Loop Trail, can be found. The Park's web page contains a link to the Topanga Canyon Docents website, which includes information on the school programs.

A map of Topanga State Park is available at the Park for a nominal fee. The map includes the various hiking trails and contains information on the flora, fauna, and geography of the park.

As a part of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, a description of the interpretive programs offered at Topanga State Park are included in the 'OUTDOORS' publication. This free, quarterly guide is also available online at www.nps.gov/samo.

Park Visitors and Demand for Interpretation

Visitors enjoy Topanga State Park year round. Attendance figures collected at the Park since 1996 show an Average Annual Park Attendance of approximately 400,000 visitors per year. Last year, the park had nearly 170,000 visitors and approximately 10,000 people attended an interpretive program. A comparison of these 2008 Park Attendance and Interpretive Program Attendance figures indicate that approximately 5% of park visitors attended an interpretive program.

Based on Visitor Satisfaction Surveys collected at Topanga State Park between 1996 and 2000, most park visitors are from Los Angeles County and are between the ages of 21 and 55. For additional information on interpretive program attendance, visitor survey results, and park visitor demographics, refer to the Interpretation and Education Resource Inventory.



The Trippet Ranch Nature Center has been closed since early 2008 in preparation for new exhibits. Interpretive panels such as the one on the right have been removed in anticipation of new ones yet to be fabricated and installed.



A hand-crafted stone amphitheatre was installed at Los Liones Canyon within the past decade. Although located near a trailhead and a parking lot, little to no interpretive programming is conducted here.



A Native Plant/Tree Garden located near the Park Office includes small identification markers.



Numbered posts along the Nature Trail correlate with information provided in the 'Trippet Ranch Self-Guided Nature Trail' brochure. A small sign has been added to this post, warning visitors about poison oak.



**Topanga State Park
Proposed Outdoor Interpretive Displays***

Topic	Location	Type of Display	Notes
Welcome to Topanga SP/State Parks Mission	Trippet Comfort station near parking lot	Panel	A bulletin board for community news will be located next to this panel
A-Hazards of the trail B-Fire C-Natural habitats D-Ranching E-Animal track	Trippet New orientation kiosk	5 panels: A & E are exterior end panels; B & D are interior end panels; C is an interior wall panel	New orientation kiosk to be constructed near existing comfort station and parking lot
Trail routes/scenic vistas	Trippet Trailhead – North Loop	Panel	A map of the trails will be featured on this panel
Trail routes/scenic vistas	Trippet Trailhead – South Loop	Panel	A map of the trails will be featured on this panel
Welcome to Trippet Ranch Nature Center (TRNC)	Trippet Nature Center	Panel	Exterior, south
Sporting weekend	Trippet Near lawn outside of Nature Center	Panel	
Intro to TRNC: Trippet family & lodge/the nature center	Trippet Nature Center	Panel	Exterior, north
Crossroads of the eastern Santa Monica Mountains	Hub Junction New kiosk	Panel	New kiosk with seating and shade to be constructed at Hub Junction
Restoration of Los Liones Canyon	Los Liones New native plant garden	Panel	

***These items are identified in the Design Development Drawings (05-14-08) of the Park's current Major Capital Public Use Improvement (MCPUI) project**