

ARTI-FACTS

The Newsletter of the Award-Winning Idyllwild
Area Historical Society

Preserving the History of Idyllwild and the surrounding
communities in the San Jacinto Mountains

Winter/Spring 2011

BAY TREE SPRING: FROM MAKE-WORK WELL TO SACRED SPRING

By Marc A. Beherec

Alongside the Banning-Idyllwild Road, between Lake Fulmor and the Vista Grande Ranger Station in the San Jacinto District of the San Bernardino National Forest, lies Bay Tree Spring. The water source is located on the western slopes of Black Mountain, nestled in an unnamed, ephemeral tributary to Mellor Creek. Black Mountain was an important Native American resource gathering



Water flows from Bay Tree Spring's cobblestone wellhead in March, 2009.
Photo By Marc A. Beherec

ground, but the spring's documented history cannot be traced so far back. According to local lore, the spring was improved by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the early 1930s. However, documentation of such public works during that period is extremely hard to come by, since their record keeping was far from systematic. But while its earliest history is hard to trace, the spring has played an important role as a roadside attraction for decades. The site has become popular with tourists due to its easy access by automobile, and has become a place known for its pure waters. Today, it has even acquired religious significance, especially among immigrant Asian populations, because of its alleged healing powers. Ironically, however, for health reasons the well was capped in 2009. This article is the result of my search for information on the spring, from its earliest uses to the capping of the present wellhead. If you can add anything to our knowledge about this spring, please contact the author of this article at mbeherec@ucsd.edu or 951-296-7561.

The earliest use of Bay Tree Spring is unrecorded, but we can draw some tentative conclusions based on oral history and local memory. Black Mountain was an important Native American gathering spot, for the Cahuilla and probably also their neighbors the Luiseño and Serrano. As Cahuilla scholars Lowell John Bean, Sylvia Brakke Vane, and Jackson Young wrote in *The Cahuilla*

Landscape, "Springs . . . were religiously significant to the Cahuilla, as to their neighbors." The author has found no specific Native American use of Bay Tree Spring on record, but the spot lies very close to the Cinco Poses Trail. Writing in *San Bernardino Mountain Trails*, John Robinson points out that this was an important Native American route from the Soboba area over Black Mountain to the Snow Creek region. The trail's name means "Five Springs" in Spanish, and it is said to have been named for five important water sources along its path. However, only Cinco Poses Spring is known. Bay Tree lies in rough ground some distance from the trail, but it may be one of these old Five Springs.

The Banning-Idyllwild Road, constructed in 1908-1910, brought more people into these remote regions of the San Jacinto Mountains, both sending them right past Bay Tree Spring and making a water source in this area a necessity. Readers of John Robinson and *Continued on page 3 See BAY TREE*

RENEWING MEMBERS Continued

Individual

Ted Belden	Hesperia	Robert Hewitt	Temple City
Jeannette M Boller	Venice	Jerry & Peg Holsclaw	Reno, Nevada
Josephine Cody	San Jacinto	David Pekrol & Anthony Jankowicz	Idyllwild
Barbara Czescik	Del Mar	Heloise Marsh	Hemet
Kathy Dickey	Cardiff-by-the-Sea	Margaret Stimson	Eureka
Bonnie Doshier	Idyllwild	Bill Waring	Palm Desert
Francoise Frigola	Idyllwild	Annette Wassell	Idyllwild

BAY TREE SPRING *Continued from page 1*

Bruce Risher's book *The San Jacintos* know of the importance of this road in developing the Idyllwild area, but the Forest Service's role in its construction is often overlooked. One of the men who spearheaded the construction of this road was Forest Supervisor Harold A. E. Marshall. In 1908 Marshall wrote to Congress requesting \$3,000 to help build a road which he hoped would stretch from the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks in the Banning area all the way to the Mexican border. He told Congress, "this will be a great boulevard for pleasure as well as for service," and argued that county officials would quickly see the importance of such a road and help fund its construction. Early users of the road took careful note of the placement of water sources along the route, which were needed for overheating automobiles, thirsty travelers, and even thirstier horses. It is possible that some of the earliest development of Bay Tree Spring dates to this period.

Local memory—which often preserves what the written record does not—has long maintained that the spring was improved by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The CCC, founded by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a means of improving the nation's infrastructure while also helping the nation cope with the Great Depression, was active in the Black Mountain area in 1933-1934, when a camp was located at the Vista Grande. According to Jeffrey Allan Smith's *Historic Context of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the San Bernardino National Forest, California, 1933-1942*, CCC enrollees at Camp Vista Grande bored two horizontal wells into a mountainside near the camp. Smith writes, "A newspaper article on June 16, 1934 affectionately named the project 'Mystery Mine' as the enrollee miners were mystified as to the source of water." Unfortunately I have been unable to find this newspaper article. But despite the name Bay Tree Spring, while there may have been an earlier, natural water source at the site, it is a horizontal well that, until 2009, brought water to the roadside. Bay Tree

Spring may be one of these mysterious wells drilled by the CCC men.

After World War II, America took more and more to her highways and byways in quest of recreation, and Bay Tree Spring became an important local attraction. The earliest contemporary document naming Bay Tree Spring that I have found is the 1956 USGS Lake Fulmor 7.5' quadrangle topographic map. Starting in the 1960s, travel authors such as Russ Leadabrand and John Battle mention the spring in guides to the region. Leadabrand waxes poetic about the well in a 1971 article for *Westways*, the magazine of the Automobile Club of Southern California: "There are two places in southern California that I know of where such ambrosial water originates. Here, at Bay Tree Spring, and at a similar spring on the way up the side of Palomar Mountain. I always fill my canteen with the water and when I get home it tastes even better than the spring water we buy delivered." Similar praises appear in local guides through the ensuing decades into the new millennium.

The most recent construction, the cobblestone feature at a turn-off from the Banning-Idyllwild Road, is a well which was drilled in 1979. In that year, the National Forest was engaged in a number of improvement projects in the Black Mountain area. Some of these were related to recovery from the Soboba Fire. That fire broke out on the Soboba Reservation in 1974 and was not stopped until it had burned 19,600 acres, including the area around Bay Tree Spring. A lonely, charred incense cedar stump uphill of the spring silently testifies to this old fire.

But the Lake Fulmor area in general was a beneficiary of a National Forest initiative to make the San Jacinto District more accessible to the public. "At this time, Southern California has the largest deficit of recreation facilities in the nation, according to the 1974 California Outdoor Recreation Resources Plan," District Ranger Danny Brit told the *Town Crier* when announcing the improvements Idyllwild and her visitors

Continued on page 4 See BAY TREE SPRING

BAY TREE SPRING *Continued from page 2*
continue to benefit from today.

Construction from that period made the spot a lush area with benches and stone walls, an idyllic resting place where a motorist could take a break and fill a bottle. And that the well drillers themselves were not all work and no fun is shown by the star-shaped hole they drilled through a granite boulder in the creek near Bay Tree.



Detail of the star-shaped hole drilled in the rock near Bay Tree Spring.

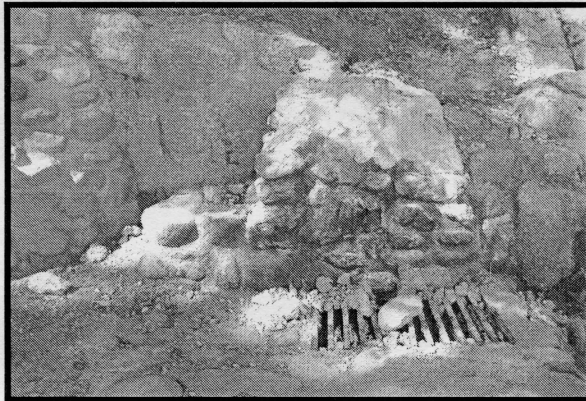
Photo by Marc A. Beherec

In recent years, Bay Tree Spring has gained a reputation as a healing well. Indeed, even the scoping letter issued by the Forest Service in regard to capping the well notes, "Some groups believe that this water has holistic, medicinal properties." One of these groups is a subset of the Hmong, immigrants who came to the United States from Laos after aiding our country in the Vietnam War. Riverside Police Captain Ross Koepp, whose book, *Culture Shock*, details his involvement in catching the teenage Hmong gang members who killed German tourist Gisela Pflieger at the Indian Vista Overlook in 1994, told me about the importance of the well to the Hmong. Several Hmong elders, he said, suggested that the assailants were in the area because of the healing spring. The Hmong are animists, believing all of nature has indwelling spirits. As Koepp pointed out, this no doubt contributed to their beliefs about the spring. In addition, many Korean Buddhists are drawn to the area by the Diamond Zen Center in Hungry Hollow. Its founder, the Venerable Chunghwa, renamed Mount San Jacinto Sung An San. Some of these Koreans view Bay Tree Spring as a healing place. Material collected by UCLA's Korean Folklore Archive credits the spring with curing two people of cancer. Finally, in the spring of 2009, I came across a series of Greek icons and posters in the Greek language along the creek overlooking the spring. One of these was an icon

of the Prophet Elijah, who was taken up bodily into heaven on the banks of the Jordan (2 Kings 2), and who to this day is considered a bringer of rain in the Near East. Another was an icon of St. John the Baptist, who of course baptized people in the same river and is linked to Elijah in New Testament theology (Matthew 11: 13-14). It is unclear if the Greek community views the spring as a healing place, but they clearly used the area as a place worthy of meditation and prayer.

Ironically, it was health reasons that necessitated the capping of the spring. After significant rainfall or snow melt on Black Mountain, Coliform bacteria from animal feces is washed into the groundwater that supplies the spring. As early as the winter of 1970-1971, the National Forest posted signs warning of bacteria content at the spring. In 2009, the County of Riverside, which monitors such health risks, was bound by law to step in. The Forest Service posted warnings in English, Spanish, and Korean, and called for public comment regarding plans to cap the well.

The well was capped with a temporary cap in July of 2009. This required removing the top part of the well's cobblestone wellhead and sealing off the water supply. The well might still be opened someday,



The capped wellhead. July 2009.

Photo by Marc A. Beherec

but that would require public interest and, like all things, money. It would need a deeper shaft, and most likely a certified water treatment system. And, as District Recreation Officer John Ladley said, "That's not something the Forest Service would become involved in."

About the author: Marc Beherec is a Ph.D. student studying archaeology in the Department of Anthropology of the University of California, San Diego. Most of his fieldwork focuses on the rise of the Edomite state in Jordan, however he is also interested in local history and archaeology. His research in the Idyllwild area and at Bay Tree Spring developed in 2008 and 2009 when he spent a year working as an archaeologist on the San Jacinto District of the San Bernardino National Forest.

THE BARE FINANCIAL BONES



And here they are:

2010 was a great year financially, thanks to our loyal members.

General Operating Fund:

Income \$31,048

Expenses \$15,665

Restricted Funds (Building, Lora Steere Retrospective, Oral History grant):

Income \$17,217

Expenses \$147,534

Year-end Cash Balance: \$28,366

(By policy, the Board of Directors maintains a cash reserve for contingencies of \$25,000.

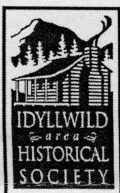
So despite the building expense, we preserved that contingency reserve, still remain debt-free, and have a marvelous new facility to preserve our collection of artifacts, documents, and photographs.)

2011 Operating Budget adopted:

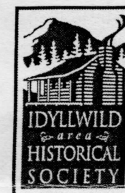
Income \$25,200

Expenses \$25,200

Bob Smith, Treasurer



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Idyllwild and the High San Jacintos

By Bob Smith

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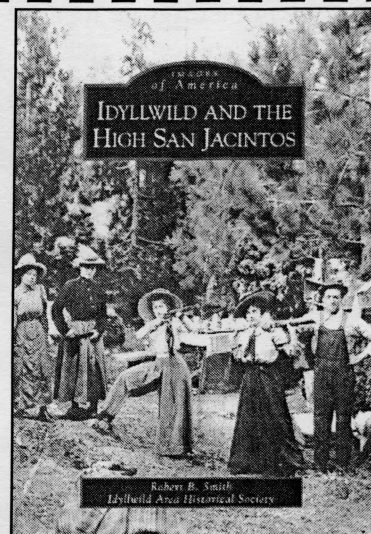
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Proving once again that it's the finishing touches that really make the difference, Linda and Larry Turner turned out one sunny afternoon to apply a coat of bright paint to some donated metal shelving, which was soon after carried into the new Archival Building — better known as the Moote building—where the shelves were quickly filled with never-before-seen treasures of all descriptions

Perhaps the reason Richard Levitski showed up was to supply some of the muscle need to carry the shelves inside. But, as one can tell from his expression, Richard didn't trust the photographer and seems to be reaching for something — a shoulder holster?

HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND PLACES

By Ben Killingsworth

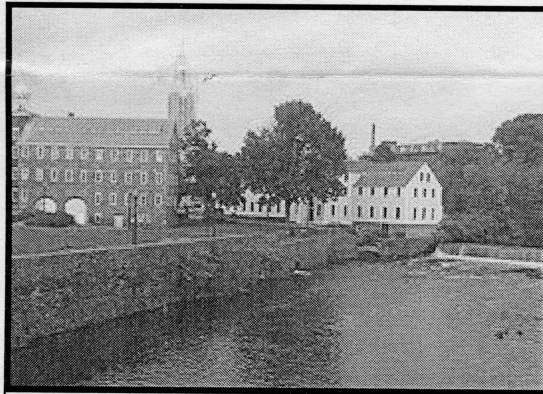
As most of us know, there is a strong likelihood that a Historical District will be established in Idyllwild, provided the Riverside County Historical Commission agrees with the recommendations of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, along with the able assistance of the Chief Preservation Officer of the Riverside County Park and Open Spaces District. The next step will be for the county to hire a consultant to develop the "design guidelines," followed by the appointment by the Board of Supervisors of a Local Review Board made up of local residents to oversee the historical district.

It is important to note that only about 10 - 30 percent of the properties within the proposed district are likely to be eligible for listing at the national, state, or local level, depending on the rules adopted by the county.

There is also the possibility that the IAHS Museum will become a separate Historical Place, but the long process required in order to make that a reality is just beginning.

Many agencies and legislation are involved

Agencies that play a part in registering historic places include the all important National Register of Historic Places, which serves as the overall administrator of the program on the national level. There is also the California Register of Historical Resources, California Historical Landmarks, and State Points of Historical Interest.



Old Slater Mill a historic district in Pawtucket, Rhode Island was the first property listed in the National Register on November 13, 1966.

Under the provisions of the Mills Act embodied in sections 50280 – 50290 of the California Government Code, California property owners who so desire may enter into a contract with the legislative body having jurisdiction, which may entitle them to a 40 – 60 percent reduction in property taxes so long as they abide by the rules outlined in the Mills Act. The owner must be a private citizen, and the legislative body having jurisdiction may assess an annual fee to cover

expenses for administering the program.

Owners who elect to sign a contract must agree to be governed by the Mills Act for a minimum of a 10 years. The contract stipulates, among other things,

Continued on page 7 See HISTORIC PLACES

SPECIAL THANKS TO -

CHRIS SINGER for transcribing a recent oral history interview of Reva Ballreich, conducted by Lynnda Hart. TERRY BAUMAN for more wonderful Idyllwild postcards and photos. MIKE PEARSON for architectural drawings showing dimensions of our old tree monument (the "totem pole"). LARRY and LINDA TURNER, CAROLYN and RICHARD LEVITSKI for cleaning and painting shelves donated to our new Moote Archive building.

HISTORIC PLACES *Continued from page 6*

that the owner will “restore and rehabilitate” the property to conform to the rules and regulations set forth by the Office of Historic Preservation of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the United States Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, and the State Historical Building Code.

Every year, on the anniversary date of the contract, both the owner and the legislative body must decide whether to “renew” the contract. If they do, another year will be automatically added to its original length. If either party decides on a “non-renewal” then the contract will continue until it expires at the end of its original length. However, the legislative body may “cancel” the contract if, following a public hearing, it finds that the owner has not lived up to the terms of the contract, or finds that the property has deteriorated to the point where it no longer qualifies as an historical property. Upon cancellation of the contract the owner must pay a “cancellation fee” of 12 ½ percent of the property’s current fair market value.

Again, if the property owner is subject to the Mills Act, sections 439 – 439.4 of the California Revenue and Taxation Code establish the methods by which a registered property, or one which is a part of a registered district, will be assessed for property tax purposes. The methods are very complicated and change each time the status of the property changes.

The program has grown rapidly since 1966

Considering the fact that the National Historic Preservations Act was not passed by congress until 1966, it seems rather remarkable that there are now more than

85,822 listed districts and places in the U.S. consisting of over 1,603,000 individual pieces of property. The huge difference in these figures is due to the fact that individual properties within a historic district, even though officially a part of the district, are not automatically included in the National Register.

About 30,000 properties are added to the National Register every year. In California there are about 2,500 historic districts and places listed in the National Register, including 53 in Riverside County, 58 in San Bernardino County, 132 in San Diego County, and 466 in Los Angeles County.

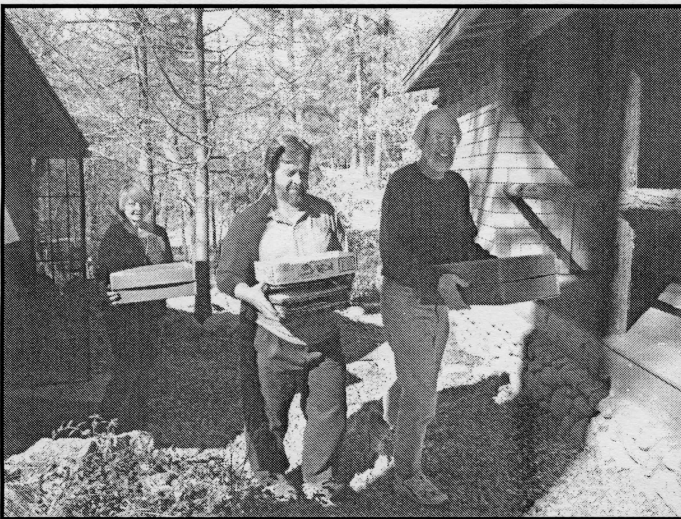
LINDA ALVALOS WINS THE BEAR



Linda Alvalos, pictured at left, was the lucky winner of the bear raffle, but decided to give it to her friend, Kristen Rupp. A recent breast cancer survivor, Linda said winning has helped give her a new outlook on life. She also said it was well worth the \$10 in drawing tickets she purchased.



Kristen Rupp is all smiles as she cozies up to her new friend, thanks to the generosity of another good friend, Linda Alvalos, who was the actual drawing winner.



Shirl Reid (seen carrying the heaviest load), John Drake & Bob Smith start the move to the new Moote Archive Building.
Photo by Rebecca Frazier

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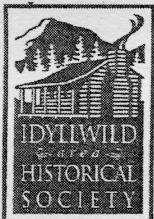
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