



# **SAN MARCOS TRAILS**

A brief history of San Marcos Camp

Vance Newcomb

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## HISTORY OF SAN MARCOS BAPTIST CAMP

San Marcos Baptist Camp is 155 acres of peaceful wooded valley where Coldspring and Los Laureles Canyons join and where Kelly Creek plays its merry way to Santa Ynez River and then on to Lake Cachuma. In the springtime it is a thrill to stand quietly under a starry sky and, in the hush, listen to the babbling brook and the wind in the surrounding sycamore, oak, and alder trees.

Many other sounds have interrupted the stillness of the valley and if the great sandstone rocks could speak, they would echo the fascinating sounds of Chumash Indians, grizzly bears, mountain lions, giant condors, Santa Barbara mission sheep and cattle with shepherds and vaqueros, and later the cursing of John C. Fremont's California battalion as it sloshed through San Marcos Pass in a cold rainstorm on Christmas Day in 1846. Then came the Stagecoach Road and Coldspring Tavern, bringing the sound of thundering hoofs, shouts, and the ring of iron wheels against the rocks--and the fearful sound of the pistols of Joaquin Murietta and other bandits who roamed the Santa Ynez mountains. More recently came the sounds of American family life, wood chopping, hikers, and people picnicking. And now come the fresh sounds of workers clearing roads, drilling wells, laying pipe, hauling lumber, and clearing brush so that the joyful sounds of Christian camping can be heard and become a part of the rich heritage that is found at San Marcos Baptist Camp!

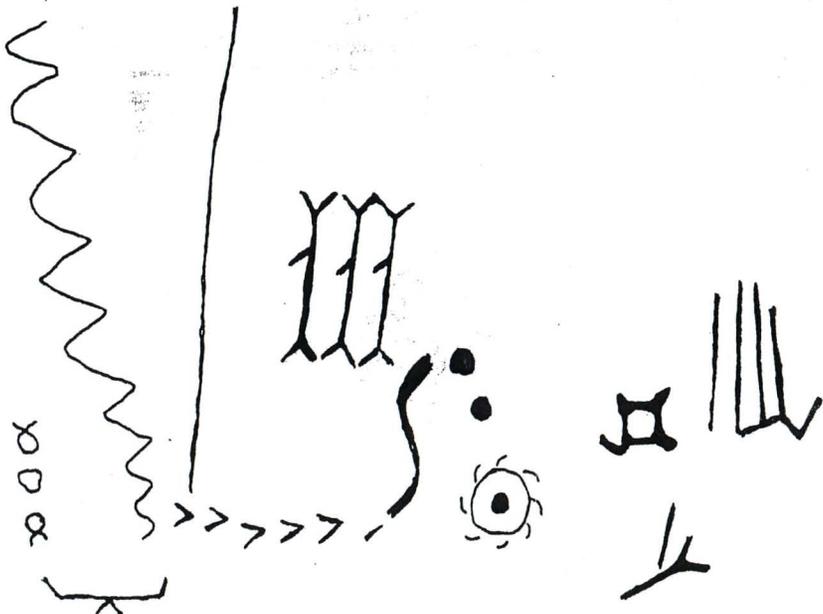


## 1. Chumash Indian Life

In November, 1542, just 50 years after Columbus discovered America, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed his two ships, the San Salvador and La Victoria, along the California shore, looking for the fabled Northwest Passage for the King of Spain. He sighted many of the Chumash Indian villages that lined the coast from Malibu, through the Santa Barbara Channel to San Luis Obispo.

Over the Santa Ynez mountains that parallel the coast of the Santa Barbara Channel, Chumash Indians also hunted, ground acorns, and lived off the land in a simple life that left little for us to know that they were there. The cave painters may have seen the Manila Galleons that sailed the trade winds, one each year after 1566, returning from the Philippines to Acapulco, Mexico. If they did, they were unaware that linked with those Spanish ships was a "force" that would end their simple way of life which had lasted over 3,000 years. Just below San Marcos Pass in Los Laureles Canyon (named for the laurel (bay) trees that grow there), some Indian bowls have been found. One painted "cave", a short walk down-stream from the center of camp, is all that remains to remind us that Indians did inhabit San Marcos Baptist Camp.

It is likely that the little valley was more of a hunting ground than an actual village site; however, the bowls and pestals indicate a family life of at least seasonal habitation.



## 2. Mission Period

Sebastian Viscaino explored the coast in 1602 and a Carmelite monk traveling with him named the Channel and Channel Islands "Santa Barbara." Over 150 years later in 1769 the first land explorers came from lower California in Mexico. Gaspar de Portola with a band of soldiers, two Franciscan friars, Fathers Crespi and Gomez and assorted Indian servants rode along the California coast. They were looking for Monte Rey bay vaguely described by Viscaino. Also, they were to explore California to find suitable sites for presidios, missions, and pueblos to colonize for Spain and thus block other nations with similar intentions.

A chain of missions was started, and the Spanish crown granted to Mission Santa Barbara (the 10th in the chain) all the Rancho territory for miles around it. The grant included the hapless Indians in the mountain valleys, who became "neophytes" whether they wanted to be or not. Father Fermin de Lasuen founded Santa Barbara Mission in 1786, two years after the death of Father Junipero Serra, who had founded the Presidio at Santa Barbara in 1782.

Little is recorded during the early years of mission life, but it is known that the Indians were treated almost as slaves in the mission system. It was Indian labor that built the mission buildings, tended the cattle and sheep, and provided brawn for the industry in the mission compound.

By 1812, 26 years after the mission was founded, its range holdings showed 3,400 cattle and 2,634 sheep. Some of these were grazing on Rancho San Marcos, which had an inventory value of \$6,111.00 that year. Rancho San Marcos was 35,575 acres of rangeland between Santa Ynez and San Rafael mountains. The first "road" over San Marcos pass was actually a sheep trail that wound from Santa Barbara, through the Painted Caves area, over the pass and down the ridge above Los Laureles Canyon, to the Santa Ynez River Valley.

Timbers for the mission were hauled over the pass on this route. When this trail was used for travel between Santa Barbara and Santa Ynez Missions it was "El Camino Real"; however, Refugio and Gaviota Passes claim more mission traffic.

In February, 1824, an Indian revolt broke out simultaneously at Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez, and Lompoc Missions. The Indian population had declined abruptly with the coming of the Spaniards who brought diseases for which the Indians had no immunity. Also, work, indoor living, and regimented lives had taken the spirit from these formerly carefree Californians. When the revolt failed, the coastal Canalino Indians, pursued by presidio soldiers, poured through the pass, crossed the San Rafael Mountains and fled to Tulare. Thus, ironically, the mission that had come to Christianize the Indians, had its part in driving them from the land--forever.

### 3. The Mexicans and John C. Fremont

The revolution for independence in Mexico in 1821 did not immediately change matters in far-off California. However, by 1830 the Mexican governors had begun stripping the missions of their great land holdings. "Secularization", it was called, allowed Mexican citizens to receive grants of Spanish Ranchos formerly belonging to the missions.

The walls of Los Laureles Canyon heard a new language, for in 1842 a young Irishman named Nicholas Den had applied for Mexican citizenship and was granted Rancho Los Dos Pueblos stretching from Goleta to Refugio on the coast. In 1845, "Don" Nicolas and his brother Richard Den purchased the Santa Barbara Mission and its only remaining holding, Rancho San Marcos, for \$7,500. This they did, as Catholics who honored the Mission Fathers, to return the mission compound to the church, but to keep Rancho San Marcos for Dos Pueblos cattle.

The mission trail, curving over the hill behind the swimming pool of San Marcos Baptist Camp, had become used to the cattle and horses from Dos Pueblos. However, the strangest thing ever to take place on this trail, happened on Christmas Day in 1846. It was pouring rain and Kelly Creek was running high with muddy water, but over the hill on the trail from the Santa Ynez River below came Colonel John C. Fremont and his California Battalion!

This odd assortment of Americans from Northern California was on its way to "recapture" Santa Barbara from the Mexican Army. Earlier in July, 1846, Commodore Stockton had sailed from Monterey to Santa Barbara when the U. S. had entered the war with Mexico. There, he had raised the American flag and left a platoon of Marines to maintain peaceful conditions in Santa Barbara.

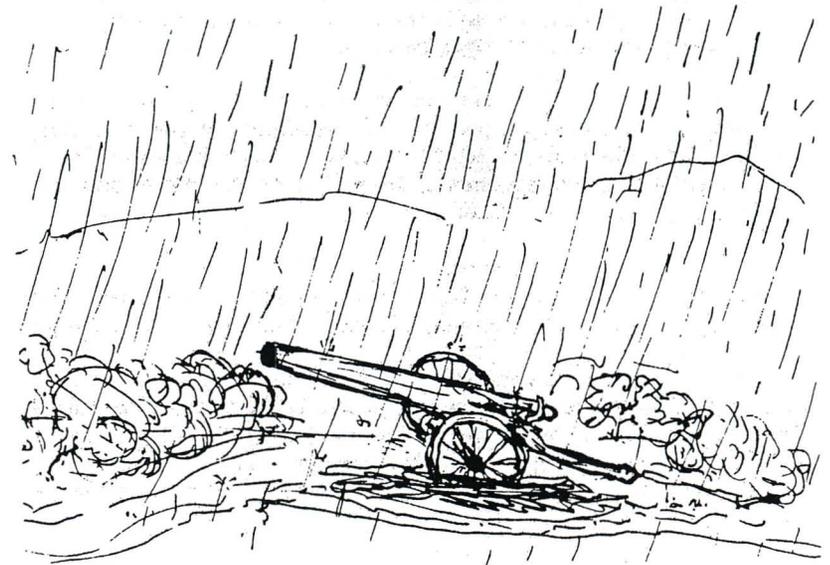
In September, Stockton returned and withdrew the Marines because the Barbarenos did not resent the Stars and Stripes enough to fight about it. One week later, John C. Fremont left eleven men under the command of Lt. Theo. Talbot to "protect" Americans living in Santa Barbara. Fremont was conducting recruiting and surveying services while traveling north from Los Angeles to Monterey.

In October, Mexican soldiers under Gen. Flores came to Santa Barbara, fresh from battle victory in Los Angeles, and ran Lt. Talbot and his men into the mountains. A brush fire was started to burn them out; however, they escaped--perhaps over the mission trail--and finally reached Monterey and Fremont on November 8.

### The Mexicans and John C. Fremont (cont.)

Fremont may have expected to find a resistance army when he got to Santa Barbara. He may have waited until Christmas to "sneak" over San Marcos Pass to surprise the Mexican army. No one knows. However, his army lost 100 horses and pack mules, and most of the provisions needed to fight any battle, as they slogged and slid down the steep mountainside toward the sea.

The Mexican army had long since departed to Los Angeles, and the Barbarenos persuaded him that they did not take part in running Lt. Talbot from their pueblo; in fact, he and his men probably would have been killed if they had. Therefore, Fremont entered Santa Barbara peaceably, re-established American control without taking punitive action, gathered up his equipment strewn up and down the mountain, and marched south to Los Angeles just in time to accept surrender from the Mexicans in the bloodless Cahuenga Capitulation January 13, 1847.



#### 4. Stagecoaches and Bandits

The first 15 years of American control of this part of California was disturbed by lawlessness, with rascals like Jack Powers and his henchmen riding the Santa Ynez trails in murderous exploit. By 1860, the influx of Americans from the gold rush and "lure" of California had created a need for faster overland travel. The slow, easy pace of the Padres along El Camino Real, was replaced by the thunder of hard-driving stagecoaches. The Santa Ynez turnpike toll road was built through San Marcos Pass in 1868.

From the Santa Ynez River crossing where Cachuma Dam now stands, the stagecoach road stayed in the valley until it reached Bear Canyon where the ascent to San Marcos Pass began. From there it wound like a serpentine up the mountain, rounded the west ridge overlooking Los Laureles Canyon, and then swung deep into Coldspring Canyon. At the great horseshoe bend at the head of the canyon where the road crossed the cool Coldspring Creek, a stagecoach stop was built. Tired horses were changed here, and weary travelers also found ample cool ale and a hearty dinner including beans from the big iron pot always hanging over the warm fire in Coldspring Tavern.

Coldspring Tavern was the "noon" or "dinner" stop for the northbound stage from Santa Barbara. It was also an occasional eating place for famous Santa Barbara families. Names like Carillo, Hill, Ortega, De la Guerra, Cota, Orena, Hollister, and Leyva were among the honored patrons.

One fable tells that a very famous unwelcomed guest, Joaquin Murietta, also visited the tavern. It is said that on one occasion he hid under the floor and waited breathlessly, while his pursuers' boots clomped around overhead. He may have faded into one of the nooks along Kelly Creek after they left.

Part of the stagecoach road is still visible on the hill near the southwest corner of camp. The rocks and cliffs there, even today, look like hideouts for bandits like Joaquin Murietta and his gang.

The stage ran the San Marcos Pass route from 1868 to 1910. It survived the bandits, but on March 25, 1901, the first Southern Pacific train ran on brand new rails that finally closed the "gap" between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. The iron horse was destined to replace the stagecoach, but it took nine more years to end this colorful era.

#### 5. Homesteads and National Forests

The Santa Ynez Mountain range was never included as part of any Rancho Land Grant, so in the 1860's it became part of the National Forest System. National forests were established to protect the nation's water-shed, and to provide lands for public use.

This public domain was available to homesteaders under the Homestead Act of 1862, and on September 11, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt signed a deed that made Frank Pierce the owner of 159 and 97/100 acres of land in the valley of laurel trees. Frank Pierce and his family cleared land and built a cabin on the plateau that is now the Camp recreation area. His horses were kept in a barn across the creek below. The hills again echoed the shouts and laughter of children, as American family life added its short chapter to the history of San Marcos.

The National Forest was created in 1908 when Theodore Roosevelt signed into being the Santa Barbara National Forest, which incorporated a number of Forest Reserves. In 1936, it was re-named Los Padres National Forest in honor of the mission Fathers, in an act signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Frank Pierce's homestead is part of an island of land surrounded by Los Padres National Forest.

The Doltons of Santa Barbara bought the property from Frank Pierce to use as a source of firewood for their homes in town. They also used some of Pierce's clearing for raising strawberries and bees. Competition from bears, which still roamed the mountains, was a problem for profitable production of honey.

The next owner was a "man from New York", who in turn sold the property to Commander Elmer Awl in 1922.

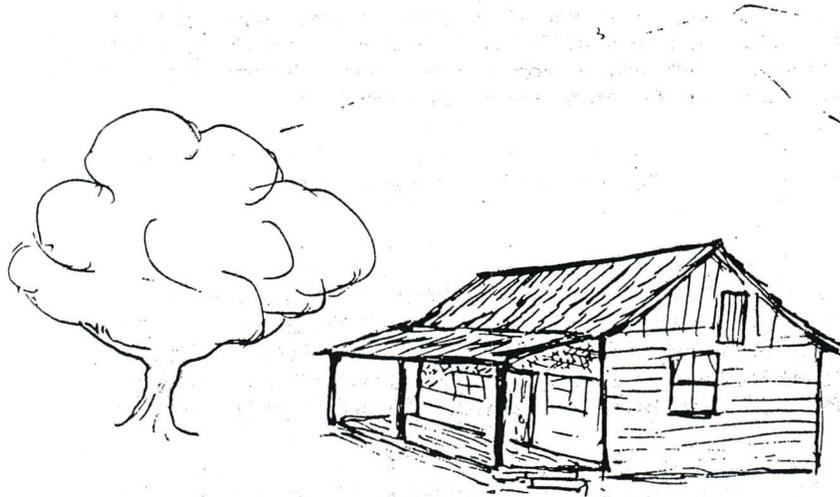
Elmer Awl, born in 1889, still vigorous at age 75, had been in the Forest Service, and, like many Californians, wanted to own a piece of California. He cleared trails on his L-shaped San Marcos property, but left it in its natural state. Though he spent many enjoyable leisure hours there, he never resided on the property. Frank Pierce's cabin and horse-barn have long since been torn down, and what boards remained, returned to mother earth.

The only way into the valley in 1922 was from Paradise Road up Kelly Creek. The Kelly brothers owned the lower part of Los Laureles Canyon long enough to have the creek named after them. Their property is still in the family and is known as Rancho de la Tios, or "the Uncles' Ranch".

Elmer Awl was clearing brush around the base of a rocky prominence near the creek, and discovered the painted "cave". Like the painted caves over San Marcos Pass, the meaning of the Indian markings are lost to antiquity. Other Indian artifacts were found, but the painted rock is all that remains to hint of Indian family life in ages past.

## Homesteads and National Forests (cont.)

In 1925, Commander Awl surveyed his land and drove a 2-inch pipe into the ground at each corner. Several markers remain to this day. He also blazed many trails to give access for hiking and picnicking. His favorite spot was up Coldspring Canyon by cool springs surrounded by woodwardia ferns. He gave the name "Post Office" rock to a hugh boulder pocked with holes carved by water and wind. Elmer Awl gave the original homestead deed to the camp when it was finally paid for. The deed, signed by President Theodore Roosevelt, was presented at the dedication service of the new dining hall in 1966.



## 6. Gableman's Vision

After 33 years of sharing his ranch with friends, Elmer Awl decided that young people should have the opportunity to enjoy the extensive acreage of woodland. So instead of sub-dividing the property for mountain estates, he offered the camp to his Methodist Church in Santa Barbara. The Methodist Church in Santa Barbara did not see how it could raise funds to make the purchase. The Presbyterian Church was considering the site, but also had other locations in mind.

When Dr. Gableman, the pastor of Santa Barbara First Baptist Church from 1954 to 1960, heard the the property was available, he had a vision that went beyond his church to all the churches in the Santa Barbara Association.

Dr. G. A. Gableman had served as executive secretary of the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention, and had assisted in the purchase and development of three camp-sites there. Early in his ministry in Santa Barbara, a realization of the need for a camp was discussed, and a search for a site was begun. It was at this time, while riding in a funeral procession with the Presbyterian minister, that he heard of the San Marcos site.

Other Association leaders began to share the interest of having a camp for the Santa Barbara Association, and a camp location committee was formed. The committee considered many areas; however, no site was found with water and development potential within reasonable cost.

Visits were made to San Marcos with Elmer Awl who, with a keen interest in young people, nature, and camping, was an inspiring guide. Negotiations were initiated.

Mr. Awl kept approximately 5 acres on the west side of Highway 154, which leaves close to 155 acres of Frank Pierce's homestead now included in San Marcos Baptist Camp.

The camp was deeded to the Southern California Baptist Convention because the Santa Barbara Association was not incorporated. However, most development funds have come from churches in the immediate area.

Some of the members of Association churches did not catch the vision of San Marcos, and the name "Gableman's Folly" became their byword. However, though they may have seen the camp, they never sat under a starry sky on "Amphitheater Rock" and sang choruses in an evening vesper service, or counted the variety of ferns, trees, or wild flowers. Nor did they hike to the painted cave or up Coldspring Canyon to a place where five water cascades can be seen from one spot.

## 7. Work Days and Camping!

From 1955 to 1959 there were many who caught a glimpse of the exciting potential of the camp. Equipment, tools, material, and countless hours were donated. The road down the hill from Highway 154 was widened and paved. A horizontal well was drilled under the road 120 feet into the mountain under "Fern Spring." Hoff Heights Hospital was torn down board by board and hauled to the camp for lumber to build the temporary kitchen, two cabins, and seven tent platforms. Plans were drawn up for permanent development.

Men like Harold Munson, Dr. Louis Needels, Joe Campos, Floyd Wittenberg, Don Galbraith, and Bill Lanier, are a few of dozens who gave many weekends to the preparation and development of the camp.

Besides hard work and building at the camp, there were other important elements of camping taking place during the first decade at San Marcos. Junior and Junior High camping programs were conducted each year. Miss Evelyn Andrus, Christian Education Director at Ventura, was "dean" of several camps. Pastors Alden Loomis, Ralph Rowe, and Jim Barnette, were among the deans and camp pastors who served with the many dedicated counselors, nurses, crafts directors, cooks, etc. from all the churches in the Association.

Planning conferences, men's retreats, class retreats, youth weekends, family camping, and many other activities, have been enjoyed at San Marcos Baptist Camp.



## 8. Camp Development

One of the early actions by the Association was to establish a camp Board to develop a master plan and guide the Association in its responsibility to fulfillment of the plan.

It was at this time that a student of architecture asked if there was "anything he could do" for the Southern California Baptist Convention for a "project" in his school. "Indeed, there was!" San Marcos had some basic plans, but it needed detailed building plans with elevations, material specifications, construction detail, etc.

A dining hall in the valley by the creek, a swimming pool in the recreation area where Frank Pierce's cabin used to be, cabins in the shady oaks downstream, culminated hours of area study and earned an "A" in architecture.

The camp Board gave general approval of the plan, and faced the task of gathering funds, association workers with contractor background to review, advise, and ultimately make contributions to actual construction of permanent facilities, and enthusiasm to do the job.

A need for someone to "take care" of the camp was felt, and Joe Campos stepped in to fill the need. Joe, a familiar figure to all who visited the camp, spent every weekend at San Marcos, working on the road, clearing fallen trees, and watching over the property, until he retired in 1971.

Clarence Laurabee, from Santa Barbara, made detailed surveys of the center areas of the camp.

In 1965, a more concerted effort was launched to raise pledges of at least \$15,000.00 a year. This figure allowed the Convention to borrow money for permanent construction. With a dining hall and a swimming pool, the rest of camp development began to fall into place. Cabins were soon added so by 1969, the old army tents and tent platforms were cleared away.

The camp development committee was de-activated after the dining hall and swimming pool were completed. Rev. Charles Tingley became part-time camp director during 1972. In 1973, a new camp committee was appointed, under chairmanship of Rev. Harold Pollinger of Oak Knolls Church in Santa Maria. Art Knight, another student architect created a new master plan more in keeping with the natural setting of San Marcos. The major goal of the new committee, however, was to work toward the camp becoming self sufficient.

Ralph and Barbara Templin became caretakers of the camp in 1971, and added new talents and continuous care for San Marcos.

## 9. Camping Programs

It is difficult to list the names of all who contributed so much materially and spiritually to the camp--for fear that important people are left out. Yet what follows is the heart and spirit of Camp San Marcos.

Rev. Ralph Rowe led a lot of Junior Camps before he went to Northern California. After that, the author was a counsellor at Junior High Camps and remembers great days under camp Deans like Pastors Don Ownby, Ken Wishart, Herb Dominguez, Russ Steiner, Harold Pollinger, Jim Alley, and Sr. High leaders like Rev. Paul Ray and Karl Miller from San Luis Obispo. Betty Hedrick was on the scene in the late 50's and was back as Junior Camp dean in 1974. Shirley Best initiated a camp for the mentally retarded, and Leona Falk has carried on her footsteps. Mrs. McDaniel took a stint with a Middlers camp.

Some rich blessings have come from watching kids like Rennie and Mark Campos grow up and give a great spiritual plus to the counselling.

Well, there were others: Dick Conrad, Mike Scaroni, Fred Engles (who hated the bugs but came anyway for years), Bob Bouslough (who suffered with Poison Oak every time he came), Terry Shields, the Jones girls, Sue (Calderwood) Gustafson . . . we could go to Wayne Murphy's office at Los Angeles and get a list that would fill up another book. But it is the spirit, instilled by those who love the whole process, that makes camping worthwhile. The campers contribute much of themselves; responding, growing, and enhancing association fellowship.



## 10. Trails

1) The "Fire Road" past the cabins, loops back to the road into camp just inside the gate, and is a interesting walk in daylight or dark. It follows the creek to the camp boundry and then goes up through trees into chaparral where a view of the San Rafael Mountains across the Santa Ynez Valley finally is achieved near the top.

2) Painted Cave (actually a painted rock) is only a quarter of a mile down stream on a trail across the creek from the cabins.

3) Desert trail branches east from the painted cave trail, and leads up the canyon into the open and past amphitheatre rock. It winds 3/8 mile into a colorful area of sandstone rocks, chaparral, yucca, and a view of Lake Cachuma in one direction and a view of Coldspring bridge looking another way. Continuing on the desert trail leads back to oasis like Kelly Creek and the Fire Road back to camp.

4) The Coldsprings Nature Trail goes up into Coldspring Canyon and starts at the sharp bend where the road out of camp begins to climb out of the canyon. Continue south of the trail up the hill, and soon the trail leads into where Coldspring Creek is a series of pools and cascades, where ferns and other lush vegetation abound. Sulphur springs, waterfalls, interesting rocks, and other delights meet the eye.

5) On the lower trail along the creek at the same curve where the Coldsprings Trail begins, if one crashes through the brush just right, he is able to find where Los Laureles and Coldspring Creeks come together.

6) Above the swimming pool, there is a trail up "Sunshine Mountain" to a lookout over the valley and campground. In 1975, youth from Lompoc Baptist Church extended the trail toward the mountain to the east. Plans to turn north to join the desert trail and south to join the Coldsprings Trail will complete a peripheral "Dr. Gableman" trail system in honor of Dr. Gableman whose efforts two decades ago gave us San Marcos.

7) Three trails branch off the Desert Trail at the north boundary of the camp. Helmet Rock Trail goes east to give access to a hidden valley in the northeast corner of the camp. Boney Cave Trail continues north toward a cliff in Los Padres National Forest just north of the boundary. Buzzard Rock Trail leaves the Desert Trail just before it descends to the creek. Continuing around the ridge, Buzzard Rock trail ascends to the highest rock formation on the ridge.