

## Tunnel Trail Mess Under Repair

### Emergency Work Concluded After Edison Degraded Cliff and Road

by Selden Edner

Since the end of September, the Tunnel Trail has been closed so that Southern California Edison could bring in heavy equipment in an attempt to forestall the effects of large-scale and unpermitted work in December 2019. The trail reopened for the weekend in November, but work is expected to continue through December.

Edison conducted major road grading work last December, beginning at the gate to Tunnel Trail and continuing up through both forks of the catway past the end of the paved road segment. The company's workers went beyond the scope of the permit, which resulted in extensive and severe environmental impacts to the trail and Mission Creek.

The most serious damage that Edison caused was dumping about 1,500 cubic yards of rock and dirt directly over the bank and into Mission Creek, just before the bridge. But that wasn't all of it. Other serious violations included the side casting (pushing loose soil over the side) of an additional 3,500 cubic yards of rock and dirt down the slopes from the paved road and catways, removal of several specimen-size oak and bay trees, damage to almost 100 other trees, excessive excavation of slopes, and removal of chaparral and topsoil. Major harm also resulted from the over-excavation of the cliff above the road approaching the bridge. Edison's work to scrape the cliff-face resulted in an unstable slope, making it necessary for the current work to stabilize the slope and prevent further rockfalls. Along the road and catways from the trailhead gate upward, Edison used the rock and dirt that was not thrown over the side to build a crude, uncompacted 3-foot-high berm along the side of the pavement and dirt catways.

These violations quickly got the attention of regular trail walkers, runners, and bikers, who alerted the city, county, and creek agencies. Ultimately, the City of Santa Barbara, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, federal Army Corps of Engineers, the County of Santa Barbara, and the Regional



**Before and After:** The rock wall by the bridge before and after Edison scraped the face of the canyon wall. Edison put up wire netting to prevent future rockfall.

SOURCE: Courtesy

Water Quality Control Board got involved in assessing the damage and permitting repairs. Edison faces multiple enforcement actions. To their credit, SCE took immediate responsibility for the damage it caused. The utility did initial stabilization work after the carnage was reported, putting up fencing, mulching part of the berms, placing sandbags, and laying burlap jute over steep slopes. Fish and Wildlife and the Army Corps have primary jurisdiction over creek-related violations and their mitigation. The city owns most of the land along the road and watershed, and it has major water infrastructure in the area. The county is acting as the primary permitting agency. The Mission Canyon Association has worked closely with Supervisor Das Williams and his office staff to review Edison's plans.

#### *MCA's Working Group*

The environmental and hazard issues stemming from the damage were immediately apparent to the Mission Canyon Associa-

tion. The creek had been filled in at a critical headwater under the bridge, rockfalls there were more numerous than ever, the catways were a jumbled mess of caterpillar tracks, trees and bushes downslope had rock and dirt piled against them, and ungainly berms lined the roadway. MCA formed a working group to represent the community's interests in the repair permitting process, with Boardmember Nancy Weiss as its chair. Other members include past MCA president Barbara Lindemann, MCA Boardmembers Hugh Twibell and Selden Edner, and environmental attorney Marc Chytilo. We must note and thank them all for the countless, pro bono hours they put into this very thorny issue.

Edison intends for the restoration work to occur in three main phases, and the working group has been able to offer suggestions for some areas. Working Group members assessed the damaged areas with Edison engineers and have been in constant communica-

**Tunnel Trail (cont. p.2)**

## Tunnel Trail (cont. from p.1)

tion with Edison and all the involved public agencies.

Edison's Phase One began in February under a temporary emergency permit. The most visible of the work are the concrete K-rails and wire fencing under the cliff near the bridge, and also the K-rail installations at several points along the road. Phase Two work began with environmental consultant reports, surveying, and preliminary road plans in February through May, including invasive weed abatement. Phase Three work, which is subject to a full environmental impact report (under CEQA), will involve the most serious damage to the creek in the area below the bridge and is scheduled to start next year.

The work performed in October was part of the emergency remediation. After the trail reopened on the weekends in November, trail users could see the safety-related items added such as rock drapery — or chain-link fencing to cover the cliff-face — and the how loose rock was scaled out of their rough cuts from the December work. Also visible are other grading work including removal of some of the roadside berms, and partial recovery of dirt and rock thrown over the edge during the December grading.

Through the summer, as Edison formed its remediation plans, the working group focused their efforts on minimizing the scope for Phase 2 with a “do no further harm” approach. The MCA members felt that only the required safety-related portions should be performed so that the remaining remediation would receive robust and comprehensive environmental review to ensure the much-used trail was returned as close as possible to its original condition.

During that process, the working group kept an open channel of communication with Edison’s project administration group. Working group members also communi-



Close-up of the fencing on the rock wall.

SOURCE: Courtesy



**Site visit:** Members of the Mission Canyon Association and county staff accompanied Edison representatives on a tour of the damage.

SOURCE: Courtesy

cated MCA's position to Fish and Wildlife. Supervisor Williams and his office lent their support to MCA's position, as well.

With Edison's permission, County Planning & Development developed a permit application sharing file that allowed the working group to access and review the myriad proposed plans and all of Edison's consultant reports. A significant breakthrough in the goal to ensure no further harm occurred came early in September when Fish & Wildlife drew all areas below the road starting just above the gate into their jurisdiction and into Phase Three. That decision ensured that a sound environmental review could occur to protect the area. The work approved for Phase Two became limited to the rock scaling, installation of rock netting (drapery) on the 425-foot-long slope just above the trail and bridge, partial reduction and shaping of the berm between the gate and bridge, and removal of the backfill that threatens oaks and other trees. At the working group's insistence, the Habitat Restoration Plan for Phase Two was strengthened to include restoration on damaged cuts on the uphill (west) side of the road. Edison has agreed to minimize any additional plant damage and mitigate any that does occur. And at MCA's insistence, Edison has agreed that it will not be trucking dirt and rock off-site. As well, County Fire required a robust fire protection plan for Phase Two that included stationing two compact firefighting trucks on the job during all operating hours. County Fire also required a flagging and parking plan to enforce parking closures during the work. The contractors for Edison worked six days a week to shorten the full trail closure, which lasted six weeks. They placed people at the usual parking spots to warn people the trail was closed.

Unaware of the various trail connections to Tunnel, however, the overnight guards were at first quite puzzled about how people kept coming down though the trail had been closed all day.

A year after making the mess, Edison pled no contest to a criminal violation of California's water code and agreed to pay \$3.5 million in civil penalties. The money will go in part to the Fish and Game Preservation Fund, and the rest will go toward Jesusita and Tunnel trail maintenance, revegetation of Mission Canyon and Mission Creek with native plants, researching and monitoring creek health, and funding to clean Santa Barbara's front-country trails and creeks.

### What Happens Next?

Your Mission Canyon Association will remain actively engaged in the pending environmental review and permitting processes. If you are interested in these issues as opportunities for public involvement arise, please send an email to [webmaster@missioncanyon.org](mailto:webmaster@missioncanyon.org). Edison has established a project website where additional information is available and its personnel can be contacted: [sce.com/MissionCanyon](http://sce.com/MissionCanyon). Questions can be directed to [MissionCanyon@sce.com](mailto:MissionCanyon@sce.com) or (805) 244-0095.



## Thank You, Medical Workers

I'd like to give a sincere thanks to all the health-care and emergency personnel who live in Mission Canyon and who work in Santa Barbara County's medical infrastructure. We have all seen you work tirelessly and perilously during the pandemic. You are all so appreciated.

Although the numbers aren't where we want them to be, I'm hopeful that with the help of the new vaccines, lives will be saved, and the community will get closer to normal in 2021. At my house, my kids are missing their friends, oddly wishing they could be at school (although adjusting well to Zoom classes), and more than ever during this holiday season missing the cousins and grandparents we normally see this time of year.

What a crazy 2020 it has been, and yet your Mission Canyon Association is working hard on your behalf. I just want to say how appreciative I am of all the volunteer MCA Board Members — it has been a challenging year in so many ways and I just can't thank you enough for your time, energy, and commitment to our neighborhood. — *Jason Saltoun-Ebin, President, MCA*

## What's a Homestay?

Thinking about renting your house out for the weekend? Does your neighbor seem to have a lot of different guests over, and you've heard that short-term rentals are against the law? Did you look on AirBnB, and were you surprised to see a house or room available for rent near you in Mission Canyon? Aren't they banned in Mission Canyon?

It's a complicated situation. Short-term rentals, defined as rentals for 30 days or less, are prohibited in Mission Canyon. The MCA understands that to mean that homes cannot be rented out for less than 30 days. If you live near a vacant home that seems to have new guests every week or weekend, that is likely prohibited.

However, companies like AirBnB, which do advertise short-term rentals, also advertise "homestays," which are allowed in Mission Canyon under certain circumstances. Homestays, according to the county, permit the "use of a residential structure rented for 30 consecutive days or less for a transient occupant while the owner or long-term tenant of the property lives in a legal dwelling on the same lot at the same time as the transient occupant(s)." Homestays thus require a permit.

To receive a permit, some of the requirements are off-street parking; proof that the

property owner or long-term tenant lives on the property; and no more than two people per bedroom with a maximum of six (not including minor children) in the homestay at a time.

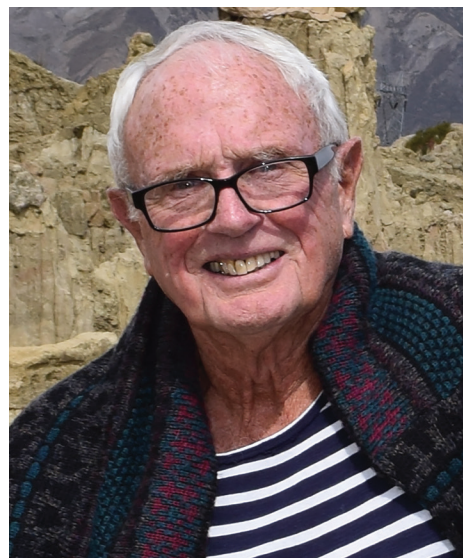
For a permit application and the fine print, go to the county website ([CountyofSB.org](http://CountyofSB.org)) and search for Homestays. — *JSE*

## Farewell, Owen Guitteau

Mission Canyon lost a great friend when Owen Guitteau died on October 25 of complications from a brain tumor. With his wife, Laurie, Owen formed the backbone of the tree trimming, brush cutting, goat grazing, and community conversations that took place in the canyon over the past decade to remove the fire dangers of excess vegetation. The work cut back 40 years of overgrown chaparral near and among our homes, projects the MCA Fire Committee started before the Jesusita Fire and is credited with limiting the destruction the wildfire caused.

It was Owen's cordial approach to neighbors and skill with contractors that helped gain the successes from relatively small grants from the Fire Safe Council. It was hard to say no to his practical advice, gained over 80-plus years living in Santa Barbara. And it didn't hurt that Owen's affable sense of humor was matched by his handsome, boyish grin.

He grew up in Montecito, catching lobster off Miramar Beach and selling them for a dollar. He joined the Army, entering Europe with the occupation forces and developing a lifelong interest in the stories of World War II. And he returned to Santa Barbara, running



Owen Guitteau  
SOURCE: Courtesy

a plumbing business and making a home in Mission Canyon with Laurie and their two children, Scott and Denise. Owen was a valued fixture in the St. Barbara Parish, helping to construct the annual holiday crèche that featured burros and sheep during its heyday. For many years he lent a hand, tools, and advice to Habitat for Humanity. And Owen and Laurie always made their home open to committee meetings and get-togethers, and they both volunteered to bring food and wine to MCA's Annual Meetings every year.

We will miss our good friend and teller of delightful stories. We want his family to know we appreciated the gift of Owen's time and friendship. — *Jean Yamamura*

## Parking, Parking, Parking

We all know that good off-street parking is few and far between in Mission Canyon, and the signage can be confusing. Many of us do not want stripes designating permissible parking spots, but it may be taken out of our hands if we continue to ignore common sense. The difference between what appears to be a legal spot and one that isn't is the presence of a narrow road, a corner, or a fire hydrant — do not park there if it's impossible for a fire truck to get through. Stay 15 feet away from a hydrant. And please talk to your guests as well to make sure they parked appropriately. — *JSE*

## MCA Officers & Directors

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The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of **Lee Anne Dollison**, graphics, production, and photography.

MCA's Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month, at 7:30 p.m., via Zoom.us. All residents are welcome to attend and can contact [webmaster@missioncanyon.org](mailto:webmaster@missioncanyon.org) for information.



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## Your MCA Newsletter Winter 2020

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Happy Holidays to All!

### Drive Like Your Kids Are Out Walking

The number of reckless drivers in the canyon is shocking, based on the emails and complaints MCA gets. Many are not residents, but our familiarity with the roads could be breeding complacency. Every few months there seems to be another accident on Mission Canyon Road — recently a car was totaled just waiting to make a left onto Glendessary Lane. Both drivers said they were fine, but the historic bridge by the Mission is a frequent casualty to drivers who take the curves too fast.

There are so many more dangerous spots! The Tunnel Road/Mission Canyon Road split is notorious for the games of chicken played daily. If you are going up Tunnel Road, please use your blinker! And those coming down Mission Canyon Road must stop at the stop sign! Not to mention that all should watch for drivers attempt-

ing to come out of Andante Road. Please remember you're not the only one in a big hurry!

We've all seen the cars that go right through all the stop signs between the canyon and Foothill Road. And then there is Cheltenham! If we all drove like our kids were out walking — and many are because they are doing school at home — we'd all take the curves a little slower. Let's slow down a bit to make it safer for everyone out walking and just a little easier for many of us to pull out of our own driveways. — *JSE*

### Dear Mission Canyon Resident

Your Mission Canyon Association is excited to announce we have updated our website. It's still at the same link, MissionCanyon.org, but with new information and format. Your MCA is publishing more frequent updates on the website so it is im-

portant to have everyone's current email address. Please visit [MissionCanyon.org](http://MissionCanyon.org) and enter your email address in the sign-up box. We promise no spam! Just important Mission Canyon updates sent to you in a timely manner.

If you'd like to attend MCA board meetings, held via Zoom on the first Tuesday of the month, please email [webmaster@missioncanyon.org](mailto:webmaster@missioncanyon.org) for the link.

And, if you haven't already, you can pay your 2020 dues of \$35 online as well, which go to such important projects as the very successful brush-chipping program we have been able to sponsor thanks to all your dues.

Thank you again for all your support in helping to keep Mission Canyon safe and beautiful! — *JSE*