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FORUM: A day in the watershed

By GEOFFREY D. SMITH | Posted: Sunday, September 5, 2010 12:00 am

The rising sun shines brightly through my bedroom window, its warm glow filtered by the leaves of the Engelmann oak tree outside --- one of many heritage trees preserved in my clustered residential development near the creek.

The cheerful calls of wren tit birds greet the day. It is Saturday, and I've got places to go!

I don my daypack and walk down to the creek for a brisk walk in the morning air, inhaling the moist freshness of the morning dew. A mile from my house I stop at the outdoor bistro for a cup of java and a muffin, and read the North County Times while enjoying the view at this reconstructed wetland in Grape Day Park.

Volunteers are gathering for a creek cleanup/walk along the mixed-use hike, bike and equestrian trail, and a group of plein-air artists is capturing images of the snowy egrets in the reeds.

I move on.

I flash my membership card at the bicycle rental stand and hop on a custom mountain bike for a quick ride along the path to the Daley Ranch recreation area, where I join a group of power hikers just preparing to hike to the top of Stanley Peak.

The view from the top is breathtaking on this spring morning, and views of the Escondido Creek watershed are intriguing.

Checking my bike back at the rental node, and grabbing a veggie burrito at the snack bar there, I board the public transit bus for a trip down to Harmony Grove to the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve.

I walk down the short interpretive trail to the Interpretive Center, where I am greeted by a friendly ranger, who reminds me of the astronomy talk this evening. I take a moment to renew my Conservancy membership with a volunteer there, then wander down to the creek to reflect in the shade of the oak and sycamore canopy.

An archaeologist from the San Pasqual Kumeyaay reservation is giving a talk inside the center, so I sit in for a half hour --- fascinating Native American history! I purchase the informative book and thank the author.

As I leave the Interpretive Center, I encounter a Boy Scout troop on a through-hike from San Elijo Lagoon. They are camping overnight at the primitive campground on Mount Whitney, and have stopped to fill their water bottles with delicious OMWD water at the drinking fountain.

The Elfin Forest/Harmony Grove Volunteer Fire Department is hosting a benefit chili cook-off, and I partake of dinner at the outdoor picnic area they have set up. As the sun sets, the ranger signals the start of the evening hike --- a moonlight walk up the "Way Up Trail" for a star-gazing presentation by volunteer astronomers from the Cal State San Marcos physics department, complete with telescopes and constellation maps.

The dark-night sky in Elfin Forest is particularly suited to this activity, and the stars virtually rain down on us like diamonds.

I reflect on the Conservancy's recent successful campaign to purchase this property for conservation, and I smile.

It was a beautiful day.

That's my vision --- what's yours?

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