

Hypnotic Fence

Opening Ceremony for Mule Hill and San Pasqual Trails

On Saturday, new trails in San Dieguito River Park will open, and one day last week, Jason Lopez prepared to trim back the chaparral in time for the festivities. "The first section was built in February 2001, so there's over a year's growth on it already," said the senior park ranger.

The Mule Hill Historic Trail and the San Pasqual Valley Trail are part of the planned 55-mile Coast-to-Crest Trail, which will run all the way from the ocean at Del Mar to Volcan Mountain, just north of Julian. Lopez characterized the two trails as "linear" — one segues

LOCAL EVENTS

into the other at about the five-mile point. Even without the signage, you'll know you

have reached the juncture, he said, because you'll see "the broad sweep of the San Pasqual Valley," including "a really big view of agriculture."

The close proximity of the trails to agricultural land makes them unusual if not unique. "I'm not sure if there are any other trails that interface with agriculture like these trails do. So it's definitely a test for the future."

The trails start just east of I-15 on the north side of Lake Hodges and extend eastward through the valley to Highway 78 at Bandy Canyon Road. What kinds of crops will hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians see along the way? "One of the more profitable crops is sod, unfortunately. A lot of grass is grown in San Pasqual," said Lopez. Another big crop in the region isn't food, either. "It's flowers to

be dried for Pier 1-style arrangements. 'Sunset Safari' is one of the prominent ornamental crops."

Lopez sounded happier to report that trail users will also pass by an organic vegetable farm and an orange orchard.

The City of San Diego owns most of the agricultural land in San Pasqual. Farmers lease the land. "The lease holders kind of act like private-property owners, but that is public land," said Lopez.

An official statement on the San Dieguito River Park website says, "A protocol for trail closure when an area near the trail is being sprayed with pesticides was developed and approved by the County Farm Bureau, County Farm Advisor's Office, and the affected farmers."

The website also notes that the deal struck with farmers provided for the construction of fencing, some 27,000 feet of it. The fencing is meant "to protect against theft of produce." But 27,000 feet? That's almost half the trails' length, which totals 11 miles.

Lopez was asked to describe the fencing. "One part of it is wooden log-pole fencing with chain link in between. Another part of it is strictly chain link. Some of it is just two-rail log-pole. And in the wild lands area, there is barbless wire fencing."

This last kind of fencing isn't intended to separate trail users from farmers' crops. "It's meant to prevent people from going into areas that are set aside for wildlife."

Lopez talked about the beauty of the trails but mentioned the fencing



Mule Hill trail, San Pasqual Valley

again when he was asked if there were any parts that aren't particularly scenic. "Well, traveling along the fencing, you get mesmerized by it a little bit," he admitted. "There's the view, but the fencing kind of captures your eye, at least at first." It's five feet tall.

There are plans to train growth over certain sections of it, but, said Lopez, "Right now, the logistics of doing that are beyond our capabilities. It would be hard to get plants started, especially in a drought year. The species would have to be a climbing native plant, like raspberry — we're not going to plant an exotic species out there — but raspberry is a water-dependent plant." Irrigation would be necessary, in other words. "And we don't have the infrastructure along the trails for that. We're restricted

by the natural resources."

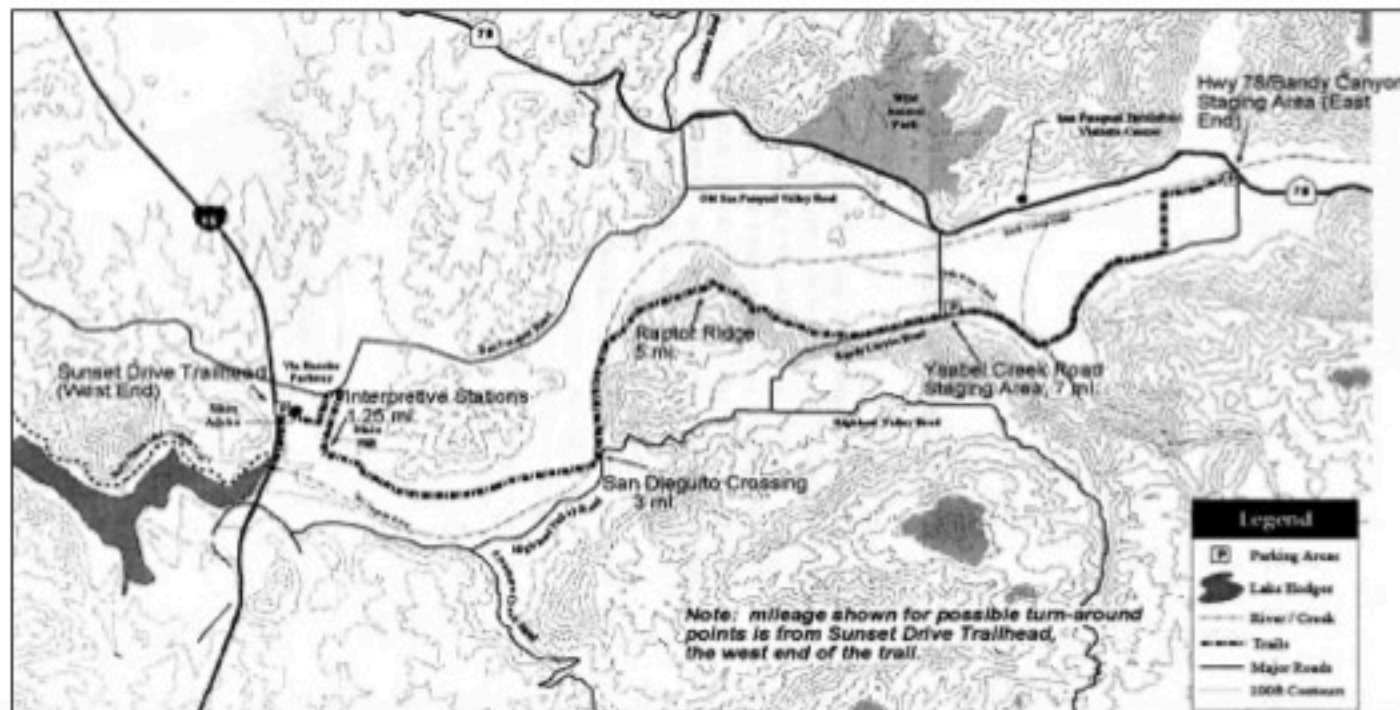
Another less-than-scenic part of the trails skirts some private land and a dairy. "We had to go along the road instead of through the pasture."

At the opening this weekend, shuttle-bus service will be available at the end of the trails to bring participants back to their vehicles. There will be speechifying, ribbon-cutting, and flag-raising. People in period costumes at the San Pasqual State Battlefield Visitor's Center will give history presentations. And outdoor writers Jerry Schad and Tom Leech will act as trail guides.

The next section of the Coast-to-Crest Trail will be built in the area west of Lake Hodges Dam. Lopez couldn't say when that project would begin. "It's a difficult section, with lots of steep terrain and rocks and a river crossing. We have some funding, but it's only just enough to get started and look at the issues."

Mule Hill and San Pasqual were reported to have cost \$900,000, but Lopez said the total actually came to \$1.3 million.

— Jeanne Schinto



Map of San Pasqual Valley trail

**Opening Ceremony for
Mule Hill Historic Trail/
San Pasqual Valley Trail
San Dieguito River Park
Saturday, June 1, 9:00 a.m.
Sunset Staging Area east of I-15
off Via Rancho Parkway
(across from North County Fair
behind the Shell Station)
Free
Info: 858-674-2270;
reservations for
hikers and bikers:
858-674-2275, ext. 5;
for equestrians:
760-789-1716**

Local Events
page 69

Classical Music
page 83

**Art Museums
& Galleries**
page 86

Theater
page 89

Pop Music
page 96

Restaurants
page 128

Movies
page 141