



Livermore Area
Recreation & Park District
An independent special district

VALLEY WILDS

October 2010

4444 East Avenue, Livermore, CA 94550-5053 (925)960-2400

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Interpretive programs at Sycamore Grove Park, Veterans Park, Ravenswood Historic Site and Brushy Peak Regional Preserve

Olivina and Me

by Ranger Darren Segur

I live in a place that has a lot of history. If you come to Sycamore Grove on a regular basis, you have probably noticed the old ruined building out in the middle of the park and the park residence site a little bit west of it. They, along with the walnut lanes and the gateway arch on the corner of Wetmore and Arroyo road, are all that's left of Julius Paul Smith's old Olivina Estate. I have been lucky enough to occupy the residence for the last several years and I often wonder about the people who lived there before me. Sometimes it almost seems as if they are still there, although I haven't seen any ghosts.

J.P. Smith was born in Wisconsin in 1842. His family was prosperous, but in 1861 at the outset of the Civil War, he signed up with the Wisconsin Volunteers. He fought in several engagements but was wounded in the right arm and captured in May of 1864. He spent the rest of the war as a POW and had to relearn how to write with his left hand due to his injury. At war's end he returned home where he met and married the lovely Sarah Barker, then headed west to make his fortune. J.P.'s brother Francis had developed borax deposits out in the Nevada desert and in Death Valley, and soon the brothers teamed up to form the Pacific Coast Borax Company. While Francis dealt primarily with the mining aspects of the company, Julius Paul took care of the business and sales end. It was he who had the idea for packaging borax in small boxes for household cleaning and soon a box of Twenty Mule Team Borax (yes, they were those Smith Brothers) could be found in almost every home in America. The brothers looked to be on the track to success but this was not to be. They began arguing about the business (some say it started with their wives) until eventually J.P. decided to let his brother buy him out. Francis, however, flooded



"OLIVINA" VINEYARDS AND ORCHARDS, LIVERMORE VALLEY.

the market with borax just before the sale forcing his brother to take a huge loss. This created a rift between the brothers that was never healed. Many years later when Julius Paul was on his deathbed, Francis came to see him but was turned away. Francis went on to make and lose other fortunes, but that's another story.

In 1881 J.P. took what profits he had and purchased land in the Livermore valley for his new estate. At this time the wine industry in California was in its infancy. Smith (and a few others) noted the similarity between the valley and some of the fine wine regions in Europe and established Olivina, a name he coined to describe his two main products, olive oil and fine wine. He then hired a foreman to prepare the land for cultivation and to construct the necessary buildings including the winery itself and, at the residence site, a fine house for the Smiths. He also commissioned bunkhouses, a cook house and several other outbuildings for the workers. Julius Paul and Sarah then embarked for Europe for the next couple of years where they toured the wine regions, learning the proper winemaking techniques and sending cuttings back to be planted at the estate. Upon their return Julius Paul was ready to put all he had learned into practice and soon the Olivina Estate became the largest in the valley, producing and

October Programs

Fall Birds of Springtown Sunday, October 3 8:30 a.m.

As migrants follow their annual routes to other climates, we'll see which ones are stopping by, or staying in, the Springtown area. This is our annual fall bird walk in the area and, as the past several years have proven, a great time for birding along the Arroyo Las Positas/Altamont Creek trails. All levels of birders are encouraged to join us. This program will last approximately 2 hours. Canceled if raining. For directions or more information, please call (925)960-2400.

Ranger Patti Cole

Marlin Pound Park
2010 Bluebell Drive

Orienteering II Saturday, October 9th 2:00 pm

Last month we explored the flatter parts of the park on an exciting orienteering course. This month we will be setting off for greater adventure on an exploration of the hilly areas. Orienteering is navigating a course of cones hidden throughout the park with only a map and compass. Participation in last month's program is not required. Please wear sturdy shoes capable of going off trail. This program will last 2 - 3 hours.

Ranger Glen Florey

Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance



Death Is Only The Beginning

Saturday, October 16 2:00 pm

Fans of *The Mummy* may recognize that saying, but we aren't going to be looking at ancient religions or having a philosophical discussion on life after death. What we will be doing is taking a look at the group known as the decomposers – those that cause and assist decomposition and decay so that plants and animals that die can “live again.” This sit-down program will last about one hour.

Ranger Dawn Soles Veterans Park

Oaks and Acorns

Sunday, October 17

2:00 pm

Come for a short walk (less than a mile) to admire the different types of oaks that grow in our parks and help us collect some acorns for planting this winter. You'll also learn about how important oaks and acorns were to the Indians that lived in this area and the process they used to make these nuts edible. We will have some replicas of tools and baskets they used. You may even have an opportunity to make (and taste) acorn porridge!

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Veterans Park



About the programs...

Unless otherwise noted, weekend programs are 1-2 hours in length.

A donation of \$2 is requested.

A \$5 parking fee is charged at Sycamore Grove and Veterans Park. Annual passes are also available and provide a substantial savings for repeat park visitors.

Contact Information

For more information on the parks, ranger-led programs or other LARPD programs or facilities check our website or call one of the numbers below.

www.larpd.dst.ca.us

Telephone numbers

Ranger Office (925) 960-2400

LARPD Office (925) 373-5700

More October Programs

Hiking the High Hills

Sunday, October 24 9:00 a.m.

The cooler days of autumn are a great time for a hike. Join us on a moderately strenuous hike up to the highest hills in Sycamore Grove Park. We should get some stunning views of the Livermore Valley and the surrounding heights. We'll also keep our eyes out for the natural and historical features we'll see along the way. Bring plenty of water and snacks. This hike will cover about four miles with some steep climbs, and last over two hours.

*Ranger Pat Sotelo Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance*

Haunted Hobbit Tree Hike

Saturday, October 30 7:00 pm

Since most people (narrowly) survived last year's Haunted Hobbit Tree Hike we thought we'd test our luck again this year. Join us for a haunted journey... if you dare! We'll gather together in a group (it's safer that way) and head out to the scariest tree in town. Those who make it will be treated to scary stories and witches' brew. Bring a scary story to tell if you would like. Costumes are welcome but remember to bundle up to protect yourself from the cold fingers of the night (and werewolf bites). Leave your flashlights at home, they attract zombies.

*Ranger Amy Wolitzer Sycamore Grove Park
Ranger Darren Segur Wetmore Road Entrance*



Special Program

Preregistration is required. You may register on-line at larpd.dst.ca.us or by phone at (925) 373-5707, or in person at 4444 East Avenue.

Meander through Muir Woods

Saturday, October 16

8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Come see the only old-growth coastal redwood forest in the Bay Area. Marvel at trees topping out at more than 280 feet tall and 1200 years old. We will spend the morning exploring Muir woods and then head to Muir beach for a picnic lunch. After lunch we'll take a walk along the coast at one of several area beaches. Transportation provided. Since this is a group tour, there will be no refunds. Fee: \$45

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shipping its products all over the country. J.P. and Sarah were prominent citizens of Livermore but also spent time in San Francisco and New York. They lived happily until 1903, when Julius Paul suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed and unable to continue running the estate. He died the next year and Sarah had the Olivina arch built on what is now the corner of Wetmore and Arroyo as a tribute to her husband. Production at the estate slowly declined, then stopped altogether as Sarah leased out the land in parcels to local farmers. She moved up to San Francisco and lived in the Fairmont Hotel while still spending summers at Olivina until her death in 1938. The estate was then sold off in pieces with LARPD acquiring the middle section in 1975 and establishing Sycamore Grove Park. In 1999 the district added a second section to the park including the winery and headquarters sites and the land above them.

There is not a lot left now. The old winery and the nearby distillery are now basically ruins. If you know the park well you can spot some of the declining orchards or remnants of foundations. At the headquarters site the Smiths house burned down in the fifties and all that remains are a couple of charming stone buildings built into the side of the hill, an old barn, some foundations and an outhouse. In 2008 the state designated the arch, walnut lanes, winery and headquarters site a Point of Historic Interest. I'm not sure if that includes me.

Meteors

by Ranger Glen Florey

Have you ever been wandering on a dark night and looked up to see a shooting star making its way across the sky? In the glare of city lights only the very brightest of meteors are visible, but if you are willing to go out away from it all you can see some amazing things.



Shooting stars happen all the time, even in daylight, but they are usually too dim to see. On a normal night you should be able to see between two and seven meteors per hour on average if you have a nice dark sky. Periodically throughout the year the earth experiences a large increase in the number of meteors per hour in what we call a meteor shower.

Most meteors we see are surprisingly small pieces of rock traveling through space. While they are in space they are referred to as asteroids which only become meteors when they enter our atmosphere. The meteors in a meteor shower are typically from the debris left behind when a comet passed through earth's orbit in the distant past. The actual size of asteroids before they turn into meteors is generally about the size of a grain of sand. How can something so small make a light so bright? It turns out to be all about speed. In space, with no air to resist movement, objects move very fast. To maintain even low earth orbit satellites must maintain a velocity of at least 17,000 mph to keep from being dragged back down. Asteroids aren't orbiting the earth so they have speeds from tens to hundreds of thousands miles per hour.

While meteors can travel through space at such speeds no problem, when they encounter our atmosphere they slow rapidly and heat up to around 3000° F. A common misperception about meteors is that they are heated by the friction of passing through the air. While friction plays a part most of the heating comes from something called "ram force." Any time air is compressed it heats up and the air in front of an incoming meteor is compressed very rapidly to a very

high temperature. As a result of all this heating almost all meteors burn up completely before reaching earth.

There are meteor showers just about every season. The easiest to observe showers are in the summer, but that has more to do with pleasant night temperatures than anything else. An annual favorite is the Perseid meteor shower which peaks every year on the 12th of August. The warm summer nights make the Perseid shower a favorite of amateur astronomers everywhere. For the last two years I have led a campout in Sycamore Grove to observe the Perseids and this year we saw some impressive meteors. While the Perseid shower is pleasant to watch it isn't the most impressive show of the year.

Each December the debris from a rare sun-grazing meteor strikes our atmosphere causing the Geminid meteor shower. The Geminids are known for producing brightly colored meteors. This winter I will be leading a hike into Sycamore Grove to observe the Geminid meteor shower. This shower peaks on the night of December 12th through the 14th but meteors will be visible a week before and after the peak. In order to not be out too late on a week night we will be going out on the night of December 11th to try to see some of these fantastic meteors.

Park News

Budget Cuts

Times are tough and LARPD is grappling with the realities of the ongoing economic crisis and the negative impacts that are affecting all of us. Due to declining property tax revenue and reductions in other revenue sources, LARPD's budget has been cut in several areas. Unfortunately, this month, we lost one full-time Park Ranger position and one full-time Park Ranger/Naturalist position. The individuals, who filled these positions, did so with dignity, purpose and a commitment to the District and our park visitors. We would like to recognize their service to the public, thank them for their excellent work and wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors. We also appreciate the continual support from our many Open Space Park users and look forward to better economic times and improvements to our parks and services.