



Livermore Area
Recreation & Park District
An independent special district

VALLEY WILDS

January 2010

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

Vol. XX1, No. I

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

Frank Ladd and Laddsville

by Ranger Darren Segur

You may know the town of Livermore was named after early pioneer Robert Livermore. What is not so commonly known is that there was already a town on the site known as Laddsville which was established by a man named Frank Ladd.

Alphonso S. "Frank" Ladd was born in Maine in 1827. He married his wife Sarah Brogan in New Orleans. In 1850 they heeded the call to go west arriving in San Francisco that same year, after a nine month sea voyage around Cape Horn. When they arrived in the Bay Area Frank and Sarah settled in Sunol. They had three daughters and a son, Joseph, who died tragically in a hunting accident in 1877 at age 19. Ladd also served as the Constable for Alameda County from 1855 to 1860. By 1864 he had acquired land in what is now the Livermore Valley and built a hotel and saloon at the crossroads.

Ladd was intent on starting a small community, and he named it Laddsville. He also built a house and planted a vineyard. By 1868 the young settlement had a population of 50 people and included 2 blacksmith shops, a brewery, a couple of restaurants and even a druggist. The first few years were a bit on the wild side with knifings and shootings occurring on a regular basis amongst some of the shadier elements of the town.

As the saloon proprietor, Ladd had to deal with such outbursts on a regular basis

culminating in an incident where a man named Hyde walked into the saloon demanding a drink. Ladd refused to serve him saying he was drunk. Hyde then picked up a water pitcher and struck Ladd in the head following it up with a beer glass. The two men struggled, and as others rushed forward to break them up a shot rang out. When the smoke cleared, it was found that Hyde had been shot to death with his own gun. Ladd was cleared of any charges with the shooting ruled self-defense.

Laddsville also had some other rough entertainments including a bull ring where traditional bullfights were staged. Sometimes a grizzly bear was caught up in the hills and tied to a bull for a bloody fight to the death, or on occasion, a badger was pitted against a dog. The bullring was said to have been about thirty feet around with bleachers positioned above the seven foot walls. As the valley got more civilized (and grizzlies disappeared from the area) these entertainments were eventually phased out.

Ladd was poised to watch the young community he started mature and grow, but this was not to be.



from the collection of the Livermore Heritage Guild

Alphonso Ladd died on November 2, 1868 at the age of forty. Fatefully, his town would also meet an early end.

In 1869 the people of Laddsville were abuzz with excitement. The Central Pacific Railroad was being built through the valley, and it was assumed that a depot would be established in town ensuring both the

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January Programs

New Year Birds

Sunday, January 10 8:00 a.m.

Let's check out the new 2010 bird models and see what they have to offer. We'll take a look at the eye-catching colors and sleek lines, and see if we can spot any sporty new models. We may even get some special options like songs and calls thrown in at no extra charge. Don't forget your binoculars and field guides; we'll have a few to lend. This birdwalk will last about two hours. Cancelled if raining.

*Ranger Pat Sotelo Sycamore Grove Park
Nature Area Entrance*

Mushroom Madness!

Saturday, January 16 2:00 p.m.

Join Ranger Amy and Debbie Veiss of the Bay Area Mycological Society to hunt under oaks, along the creek and in meadows for fabulous fungi! Learn what makes mushrooms so very different from plants and animals and be amazed at the many weird and wonderful varieties we find in Veterans Park. We will only be walking a short distance, but we will be going off trail so wear shoes that can get muddy. We go rain or shine.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer Veterans Park

Creatures of the Night

Sunday, January 17 6:00 p.m.

It sounds like the title of a horror film, but the title of this program really just refers to animals that are nocturnal – or like to come out at night. Join us tonight for a slide show to look at some of these critters and learn a little bit about them.

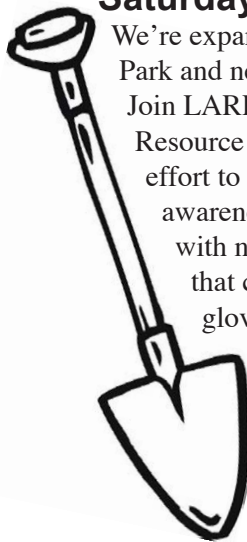
*Ranger Dawn Soles Veterans Memorial Building
522 South "L" Street*

Native Garden Planting Day

Saturday, January 23 10:00 a.m.

We're expanding the native garden in Veterans Park and need your help to put in new plants. Join LARPD and the Alameda County Resource Conservation District in our joint effort to improve wildlife habitat and promote awareness about opportunities to garden with native plants. Wear clothes and shoes that can get dirty, and bring gardening gloves if you have them; we'll have some to lend. This volunteer work day is good for all ages. Please call (925) 960-2400 to let us know you plan to attend. Cancelled if raining heavily.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer Veterans Park

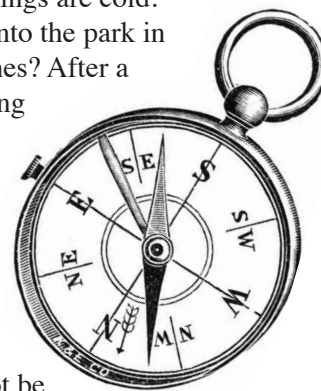


Winter Compass Course

Saturday, January 23 2:00 p.m.

The grass is green and damp, the leaves are gone from the trees, and the mornings are cold. What better time to set out into the park in search of the lost trail of cones? After a short introduction and training on the use of a compass, we will be setting out into the park to explore some of the seldom-used game trails in pursuit of a prize at the end of the trail. Please wear comfortable walking shoes and long pants as we will not be sticking to trails.

Ranger Glen Florey



Veterans Park

About the programs...

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

A donation of \$2 is requested.

A \$4 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 January Programs

Native Planting: Grasslands Sunday, January 24 10:00 a.m.

This hands-on program will provide an opportunity to learn about our unique native grassland habitats and participate in the restoration of this increasingly rare feature of our landscape. We'll meet for a brief introduction to the ecology of California grasslands and then plant a variety of native grass and wildflower seedlings. Wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves if you have them. Please call (925) 960-2400 to let us know you plan to attend. Cancelled if raining.

Ranger Lewis Reed Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance

In Search of the Slimies Sunday, January 24 1:00 p.m.

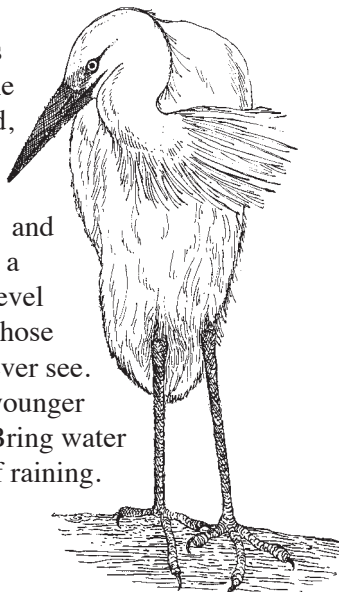
While many humans head for shelter during our wet winter months, there are lots of critters that thrive outdoors during this time. Today we'll go in search of those "slimies" under logs and leaves, in pools and puddles. Be prepared to hike off-trail into wet vegetation and through the mud. Please sign-up in advance by calling (925) 960-2400. Heavy rain cancels.

Ranger Patti Cole Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance

Creek Walk Saturday, January 30 10:00 a.m.

This time of year, one of the prettiest walks in the park is the single track trail along the creek. With scenic views and, usually, multiple wildlife sightings it's easy to forget about the outside world and just enjoy nature. Join us for a moderate 2 mile walk over level ground as we explore areas those who stay on the bike path never see. Good for ages 5 and up (or younger if you want to carry them). Bring water and good shoes. Cancelled if raining.

Ranger Darren Segur
Sycamore Grove Park
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.

Junior Rangers January through June, 2010

Junior Rangers will be returning in 2010 with more fun, exploration, and adventure. Join us this winter and spring as we spend Saturdays in the park hiking, playing games, collecting critters and learning about our natural world. In addition to our regular meetings there will be two overnight campouts including the famous Neanderthal camping! Most meetings are in Veterans Park. Meets twice a month. Ages 9-13. Fee: \$225

Rainy Day Reptile

by Naturalist Sharon Peterson

During the chill and damp days of winter many animals hide away in sheltered spots. Other animals thrive when the temperatures dip, and the rain begins to soak the ground. Salamanders, for instance, need moist conditions and are active in the rainy months of winter.

Most people think of reptiles as creatures that prefer the sunny, warm months of the year. After all, gopher snakes, king snakes and rattlesnakes are slow and sluggish when they are cold. To get up to full speed these cold-blooded reptiles need to find a warm spot, such as a sunny rock or asphalt path, where they can lounge long enough to raise their body temperature. During cold, drizzly winter days these snakes are hidden away waiting for warmer weather.

Though these familiar snakes and many lizards make themselves scarce during the winter, there are some reptiles that are more active at this time of year. One of these is a mysterious little creature that most people will never come across when they visit Sycamore Grove. The sharp-tailed snake (*Contia tenuis*) is a shy and retiring little snake that is not likely to be found out in the open.

If you see a sharp-tailed snake, you may mistake it for an earthworm at first. They are small and slender with smooth scales that are a pinkish brown and/or grey color above. The belly is a cream color with black bars. Though field guides list the length of this snake as being from eight to eighteen inches, most that I have seen have been from about six to eleven inches

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Reptile, continued from page 3

and not even as big around as a pencil.

The unique feature that gives this snake its common name is its tail. It looks almost as if there is a small thorn where the end of the tail should be. The purpose of this pointed tail is not clear. It is not used to inject venom and cannot be wielded with enough force to pierce the skin of a human. Is it used more effectively as a defense against some other predator? Is it used to help with capturing or eating their prey?

The prey that the sharp-tailed snake hunts is slugs. According to Robert Stebbins in *California Reptiles and Amphibians* (1974), the snake has "...long teeth adapted for holding its slippery food." Of course, this means long teeth relative to a head that is likely to be smaller than a Jelly Belly jelly bean so people have nothing to fear.

There is still much that is not known about these creatures. The snake's range includes parts of California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.



photo Gary Nafis/CaliforniaHerps.com

However, more detailed information on how they live and on how abundant or rare they are in different parts of their range is hard to come by because of their reclusive habits. When it is too cold or too dry, they retreat underground. When conditions are right, and they are active above ground, this rainy day reptile tends to stay under leaves, logs, rocks and other cover.

One discovery made within the last decade is that there appear to be two species of sharp-tailed snakes. Research by Chris Feldman and Greg Spicer, published in the *Journal of Herpetology* in 2002, indicates that there is a north coast population and a genetically different population that is found more inland and to the south. According to *Western Amphibians and Reptiles* (Stebbins 2003) the, "Long-tailed variety of this snake associated with coniferous forests of coastal Calif. And sw. Oregon. Appears to be a new species, and seems to occupy cooler, more sheltered and humid habitats than Short-tailed form."

As you can see, there is still much to be learned about these mysterious little reptiles. Perhaps you will never see one in the wild, but take a second look whenever you find an earthworm. One of these days you may be lucky enough to observe this shy little snake.

Laddsville, continued from page 1

permanency of the young community and profits for its citizens. Early valley settler William Mendenhall, however, had a different idea. He had acquired land west of Laddsville that he had surveyed for a town site including a site for the railroad depot. He then offered the depot site to the Central Pacific for free. When they took him up on it, he suddenly found himself the owner of the new townsite which he named Livermore after his friend and fellow early pioneer Robert Livermore.

This started a fierce rivalry between the two towns which was often demonstrated in competitions between the volunteer fire departments. In the struggle to develop into a larger, thriving community Livermore, with its train depot, had the upper hand, and steadily grew while Laddsville shrank. In 1871 a major fire burned most of the buildings in Laddsville, and the hotel burned in 1876. These buildings were never replaced, and eventually Livermore expanded to include the earlier town site. The intersection of Ladd Avenue and Junction Street near Junction Middle School is where Frank Ladd's hotel was located. Aside from the Ladd Avenue street signs and an old Eucalyptus tree, there is little to mark the sight. A train went by on the nearby tracks as I was looking around, but it didn't stop.

Park News

LARPD class registration

Registration for classes that are listed in the LARPD Winter/Spring Classes and Programs brochure begins January 6th. The District offers a wide variety of programs. Look for outdoor recreation programs and trips led by rangers to view huge flocks of migratory birds, enjoy wildflowers, explore nature with your preschooler, go backpacking, or visit the top of Brushy Peak. You can view a copy of the brochure on the LARPD web site. Outdoor recreation is on page 36.