Laguna Coast Wilderness Park

Laguna Coast Wilderness Park lies within some of the last remaining coastal canyons in Southern California. Forty miles of trails lead the visitor through oak and sycamore woodlands and up onto ridges with expansive scenic vistas. Rocky bluffs tower above the canyon trails.

Visitors to Laguna Coast Wilderness Park can see California as it has existed for thousands of years. The Coastal Sage Scrub community covers hilltops and slopes, along with patches of Native Valley Grassland and Maritime Chaparral. In the canyons visitors can find riparian habitats lined by Willow, Oak, and Sycamore trees. After a plentiful winter rain, the ephemeral streams spring to life. In the summer, you can easily pass through the seasonally dry creek beds.

The park is part of the Natural Community Conservation Planning program, which is designed to protect rare and endangered species, from California Gnatcatcher to Orange-Throated Whiptail, by preserving large tracts of Orange County’s rapidly disappearing Coastal Sage Scrub community. Other species benefit from this preservation, including Mule Deer, Long-tailed Weasel, Bobcat, Red-tailed Hawk, and many more.

Laguna Coast Wilderness Park’s 7,000 acres are part of the South Coast Wilderness area, comprised of Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, Crystal Cove State Park, The City of Irvine Open Space, and Laguna Coast Wilderness Park (totaling almost 20,000 acres).

Visit the park’s award-winning Nix Nature Center to learn more about Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and for trail information and orientation.

Before Laguna Canyon became a wilderness park, a housing development was proposed to be built in and around the canyon, tentatively called "Laguna Laurel". The 2,150-acre (8.7 km²) community, which was proposed to contain 3,200 housing units as well as a number of businesses, was canceled in the 1990s after the City of Laguna Beach purchased four of its parcels in order to provide space for a wilderness park, while the City of Irvine purchased one, and Laguna Coast Wilderness Park was opened and dedicated in 1993. Occasionally, the park system is augmented by donations of vacant land. The proposal to stop the development was supported by a crowd of eight thousand in 1989, which gathered in Laguna Canyon in a protest known as the "Walk-In". Several years later, two to three thousand gathered to protest the construction of California State Route 73(which would cross the canyon), but the highway was built eventually.
“We Saved Our Canyon”
November 11th, 1989 - Laguna Beach CA USA -
An Homage to the People and Events that Helped Preserve Open Space

The Save Our Canyons Walk, November 11, 1989 was a time and place where the environmental movement made a stand for future generations to preserve open space and the jewel of Orange County - Laguna Canyon. Numerous groups and individuals came together and united around the original ‘walk and protest’ concept by Charles Michael Murray of Endangered Planet Gallery, which propelled many people and groups creating the event. Thousands took part by walking, bike riding, running, hiking and engaging around the stage and an area at the base of Laguna Beach gallerist Mark Chamberlain and Jerry Burchfield’s “The Tell” - a significant art statement about preservation.

The event was launched when a public service announcement that was produced and performed by award-winning singer, Jose Feliciano, which aired on radio stations throughout Orange County. Feliciano produced the 30-second recording that aired live during a passionate presentation at a Laguna Beach City Hall meeting - a call for united action to “Save Laguna Canyon”.

The “Save Our Canyons Walk” and its numerous organizers including the Laguna Canyon Conservancy, The Laguna Greenbelt Inc., Village Laguna, the City of Laguna Beach, Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce, Laguna Beach City Council Mayor Bob Gentry, Mayor Pro Tem Lida Lenney, Martha Collison, Neil Fitzpatrick, and Dan Kenney, others included Harry Huggins, Toni Iseman, Carolyn Wood, Jim and Linda Rushing, Gene Felder, Mark Chamberlain, Jerry Burchfield, Richard Henrikson, Elisabeth Brown, Verna Rollinger, Linda Eckmann, Sally Rapuano, Kurt Cornel, Joel Easton, Chauncey Werner, Ken Kube, Terri Quam, Bill Atkins, Doug Rowe, Don Took, Mario Mendoza and many others ignited a positive negotiation with then Laguna Beach Mayor Pro Tem Lida Lenney and The Irvine Company. The successful negotiations resulted in a decision to sell the property to the City of Laguna Beach, thus preserving Laguna Canyon for open space to be enjoyed by all.

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Gathering at The Tell for the Nov. 11, 1989, Walk in the Canyon. (Courtesy BC Space Archives / June 5, 2013)

A protest sign at The Tell for the Nov. 11, 1989 Walk to the Canyon. (Courtesy BC Space Archives / June 5, 2013)