

A HISTORY OF SAGE RANCH, VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

by Albert Knight
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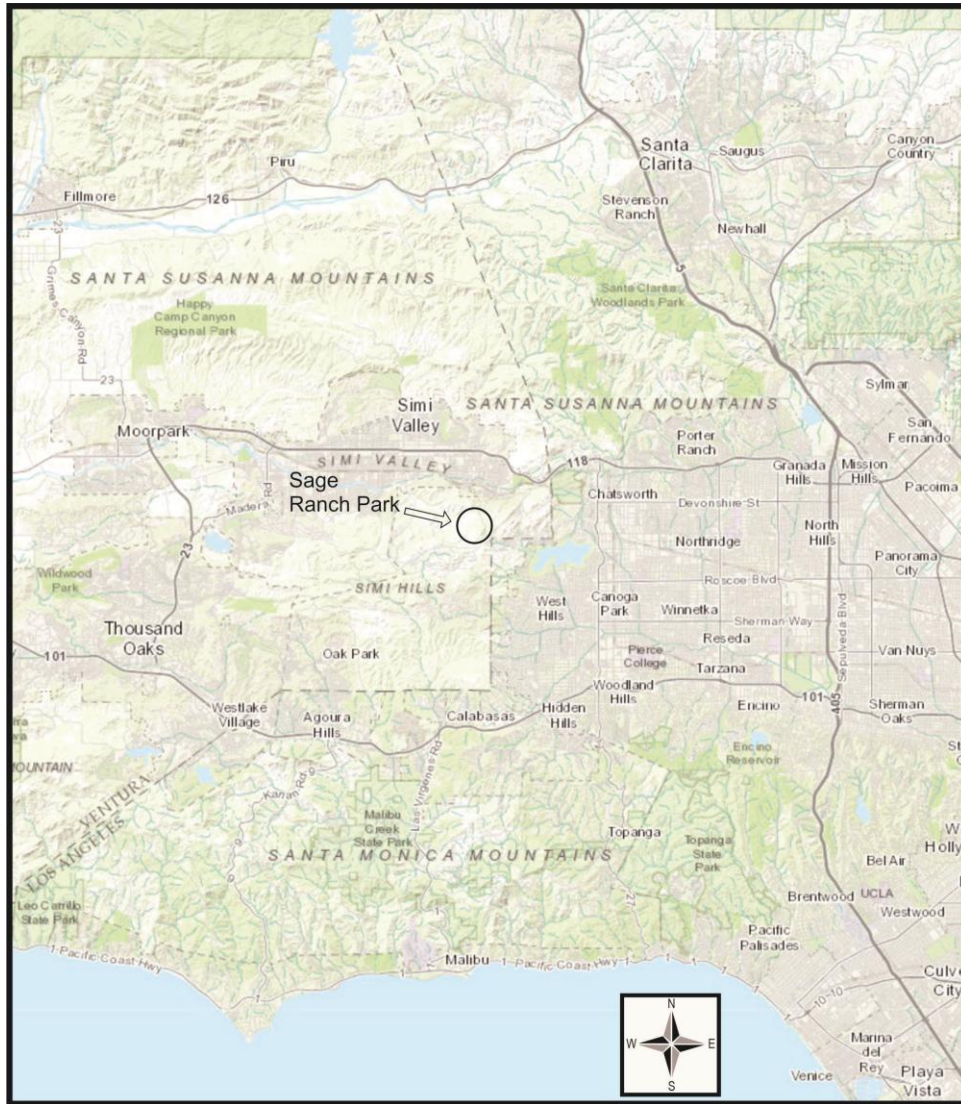


Figure 1
Sage Ranch Location Map

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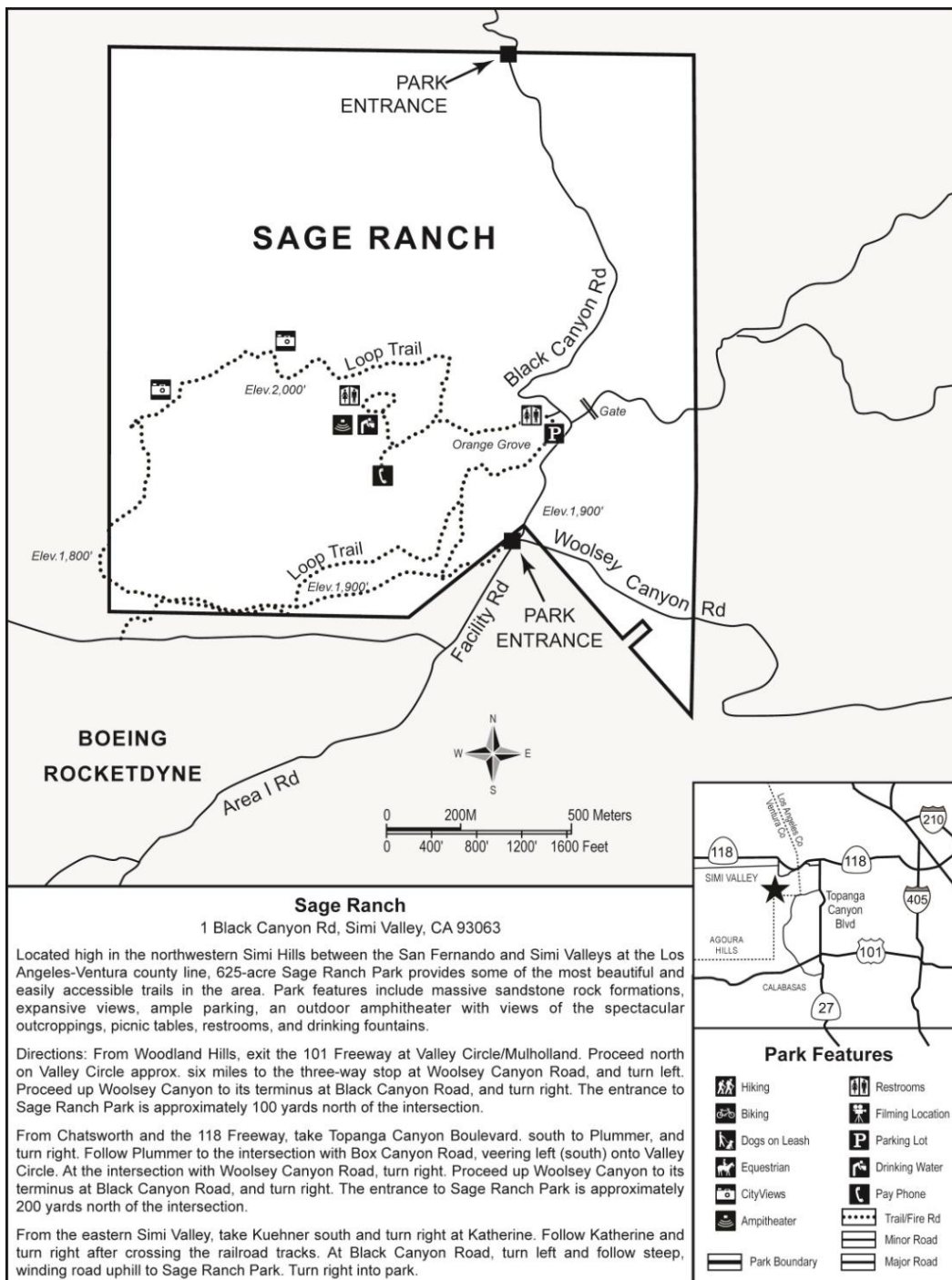
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Sage Ranch
 1 Black Canyon Rd, Simi Valley, CA 93063

Located high in the northwestern Simi Hills between the San Fernando and Simi Valleys at the Los Angeles-Ventura county line, 625-acre Sage Ranch Park provides some of the most beautiful and easily accessible trails in the area. Park features include massive sandstone rock formations, expansive views, ample parking, an outdoor amphitheater with views of the spectacular outcroppings, picnic tables, restrooms, and drinking fountains.

Directions: From Woodland Hills, exit the 101 Freeway at Valley Circle/Mulholland. Proceed north on Valley Circle approx. six miles to the three-way stop at Woolsey Canyon Road, and turn left. Proceed up Woolsey Canyon to its terminus at Black Canyon Road, and turn right. The entrance to Sage Ranch Park is approximately 100 yards north of the intersection.

From Chatsworth and the 118 Freeway, take Topanga Canyon Boulevard. south to Plummer, and turn right. Follow Plummer to the intersection with Box Canyon Road, veering left (south) onto Valley Circle. At the intersection with Woolsey Canyon Road, turn right. Proceed up Woolsey Canyon to its terminus at Black Canyon Road, and turn right. The entrance to Sage Ranch Park is approximately 200 yards north of the intersection.

From the eastern Simi Valley, take Kuehner south and turn right at Katherine. Follow Katherine and turn right after crossing the railroad tracks. At Black Canyon Road, turn left and follow steep, winding road uphill to Sage Ranch Park. Turn right into park.

Figure 2
 Sage Ranch Park Map

1. Introduction

This paper consists of four sections: 1- An Introductory section, 2- A section that discusses the history of Sage Ranch, 3- A section that summarizes what we currently know about the archaeological sites on Sage Ranch, and 4- a short story/report called "The Last Refuge." Note that all of the current, formally recorded, archaeological sites on Sage Ranch were recorded by the author. An additional prehistoric site has also recently (October 2016) been discovered, but is not described here. There are undoubtedly other unrecorded prehistoric sites on the ranch and, with the exception of CA-VEN-1570H / 56-001570, none of the historic sites on the ranch have been formally recorded.

The main focus of the paper is the second section, which is based on oral histories by Orrin Sage Jr. Mr. Sage presented some of those oral histories to the author, and other interested parties, during field visits to the ranch, and he and his wife, Cindy Sage, provided the author with several historical photographs of the ranch and their family; detailed comments concerning the contents of the photographs were also provided. Although some additional information about Sage Ranch was gleaned from other people that are knowledgeable about the area where the ranch (now park) is located (see Acknowledgements), this report would not have been possible without the contributions made by the Sage family. The author also notes that Orrin and Cindy are also quite knowledgeable about the natural history and the history of the general area of the eastern Simi Hills. Orrin Sage Jr. completed both a Masters and PhD degree in Geology at UCSB which extensively described the geologic, hydrologic and fracturing features of the Sage Ranch and surrounding areas including Rocketdyne (now Boeing) and nearby ranches. Indeed, the author suspects that they are now the most knowledgeable people as regards this area; both Orrin and Cindy provided a considerable amount of information about the area where the Santa Susana Field Laboratory was established (see below) and beyond. Only some of that information is included here; the author hopes to incorporate the rest of the information that they provided, in what is now a draft manuscript on the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch, which was the next private property to the west of Sage Ranch.

This paper is not intended to be definitive. Although many of the places mentioned here were field checked, and some GPS mapping was done, so as to confirm the exact location of particular places on the ranch, no formal archaeological field survey was performed and no new prehistoric or historic sites were recorded (this should certainly be done in the future). The main purpose of this report is to attempt to make sure that the regionally important historical information that was mentioned above is recorded, preserved, and made available to those people that are interested in the history of the eastern Simi Hills now, and in the future. This report, and any additional information that was collected during the preparation of this report but not included in it, will be summarized and forwarded to the State of California South Central Coastal Information Center, at California State University Fullerton, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area division of the National Park Service, The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (where Dr. Sage was a Trustee in the 1990's), and the Chatsworth Historical Society.

Sage Ranch Park has been public property since 1997. The 625-acre park is owned and operated by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (hereafter MRCA), and it is located in the eastern Simi Hills, which are part of California's Transverse Ranges geomorphic province. Most of the Simi Hills are in southeast Ventura County, while the eastern-most end is in Los Angeles County; the highest point is Simi Peak, at 2,401 ft. (732 meters). The eastern part of the hills, including Sage Ranch, forms an upland that consists of a diverse terrain of hills, ridges, canyons, flats, and scenic rock outcrops. Sage Ranch is, generally speaking, located between the northern and southern branches of Sycamore Canyon, which is a tributary of Meier Canyon. Meier Canyon itself flows to the north and enters the Arroyo Simi, one of the eastern tributaries of Calleguas Creek, which reaches the Pacific ocean at Point Mugu. The south (high) end of the ranch forms an uneven plateau, which drops off steeply to the north, and only becomes semi-level again in a valley at the north (low) edge of the ranch.

The geology of the Simi Hills includes several marine and non-marine sedimentary rock formations. Most of the particulars concerning the area geology, however, are outside of the scope of this report. One specific geological formation is of particular interest here, however. This is the upper Cretaceous Chatsworth Formation. The Chatsworth Formation is interbedded with sandstone, claystone, shale, and siltstone, which are often highly fractured and therefore subject to deep erosion, so that small caves, rock shelters, and cavities, of various sizes and configurations, are common. It is clear that the Chatsworth Formation provided especially good shelter, food, water, and other valuable resources, and was a naturally bountiful place for Native Americans to live, as shown by the presence of several prehistoric archaeological sites on the ranch. The geology of the Chatsworth Formation is described in Orrin Sage, Jr. (1971) and in Squires (1997:294-296).

Plant communities in the Simi Hills include coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland, mulefat scrub, freshwater marsh, southern coast live oak riparian forest, southern willow scrub, baccharis scrub, Venturan coastal sage scrub, and native grasslands. Sage Ranch is part of an important wild-life corridor, that connects the Santa Monica Mountains with the Los Padres and Angeles national forests, to the northwest and the northeast, respectively. The Simi Hills are home for numerous species of mammals, birds, and reptiles. Larger mammals such as mule deer, mountain lion, and bobcats were commonly observed during the ranching days prior to the establishment of the Ronald Reagan Highway 118 freeway, which created a wildlife corridor barrier. In December, 2016 a collared mature female mountain lion that had given birth to three cubs earlier in the year was killed on the freeway just east of Rocky Peak Road. A black bear was recently photographed by a game camera on the adjacent SSFL. The natural history of the eastern Simi Hills is discussed in Kuhn (1997), King (2011), King and Parsons (2000), and elsewhere. The importance of the plant community to Native Americans is described in Timbrook (2007).

The Sage's also owned another horse and cattle ranch in Chatsworth. The ranch was purchased in 1942 and was at 10101 Farralone Ave., near Oakwood Memorial Park. They also had an alfalfa ranch at the northeast corner of Baden and Plummer as well. Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were nearby neighbors. Irrigated pasture and alfalfa were grown on the ranches. Cattle

were raised on the Farralone ranch and movie star horses were also boarded on the ranch, including horses belonging to The Lone Ranger, Hoot Gibson, Ken Maynard, Gene Autry, etc. Estelle Maier also kept her horses on the ranch, after her father sold the Maier Ranch in Simi Valley (now Brandeis-Bardin University, and including the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch, which later became the SSFLs Areas II, III, and IV). "Estelle Maier who my mom knew well. I remember her visits to our Chatsworth Ranch to visit her horses that we kept for her after Brandeis acquired the Maier Ranch. Her oldest horse was named Simi and all of her half dozen horses eventually died on our Chatsworth Ranch per her wishes" (Orrin Sage, personal communication 10/30/15).

Before proceeding to describe the history of Sage Ranch, it is necessary to make a general distinction between North American Aviation (NAA), Rocketdyne, and the (now) former Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL), due to the use of these terms in the text. Briefly, in 1947 a company known as North American Aviation leased a portion of Sage Ranch from the Dundas family and began rocket engine testing in what later became known as the Santa Susana Field Laboratory Area I. What became Areas II, III, and IV came into existence after the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch- to the west of Sage Ranch and Area I- was purchased in 1954 by what had by then become known as the "Rocketdyne and Power Division of North American Aviation," which became widely known as simply "Rocketdyne." A variety of ownership and administrative changes subsequently took place, and the entire facility eventually became known as the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL). Owners and operators eventually included (and include) the Boeing Company, the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA), and the Department of Energy (DOE). Today the facility, which no longer performs scientific testing of any kind, is correctly referred to as "the former SSFL," although most people still call it "the SSFL." The name "North American Aviation" is now known by only a few (and used by no one), while many "old-timers" still call the place "Rocketdyne" (Bryne 2012).

2.1 Sage Ranch History

The history of Sage Ranch is outlined in the following Timeline-

- 1930s Orrin Sr. first visited the eastern Simi Hills area while hunting.
- 1942 Sage family (Orrin Sr. and wife Evelyn) live at their Chatsworth Sage Ranch, at 10101 Farallon Ave.
- 1942 Orrin Sr. made his first lease of about 1,800 acres, from the Dundas family, for range cattle. The family called Sage Ranch "Home Ranch," even though their Chatsworth Ranch had been established first. Sage Ranch originally consisted of about 760 acres, but by 1974 it had been reduced to 625 acres (which later became the current Sage Ranch Park).
- 1946 Orrin Junior born. Orrin will eventually receive a PhD in Geological Sciences from UCSB in 1973. His MA thesis in geology discussed the Chatsworth Formation. Orrin and wife Cindy helped establish the Environmental Studies Program at UCSB in 1970 and formulated and taught the Environmental Impact Analysis classes for 15 years. The classes were voted the most valuable by a student alumni survey in several subsequent years.
- 1947 North American Aviation leases 540-acres of Paradise Valley from the Dundas family. The Sage family had been running cattle in this area since 1942.
- 1948 Evelyn Sage was the first graduate in agriculture from Pierce College.
- 1954 North American Aviation makes outright purchase of the Dundas family's portion of Paradise Valley (this will become Area I). North American Aviation also purchases the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch (this will become Areas II, III, and IV).
- 1974-75 Orrin, Jr. and wife Cindy built the bunkhouse with a chainsaw and hand tools. It was a 12' by 20' structure with an attached three-sided shower room (solar panel and an oak-wood boiler provided hot water). There was no electricity nor plumbing other than the hot water in the shower room and an outhouse nearby. Wood-burning stoves kept the bunkhouse snug and warm. The cook shack was a separate building connected by an open-air deck to the bunkhouse. A hole was cut in the north wall of the bunkhouse in 1980 and a new children's room added there when their second daughter was born in 1980.
- Late 1970's About 100 acres of Bacon avocado and Valencia orange trees were planted by the Sage family and friends from Santa Barbara. No oak trees were ever removed. The water system engineering was done by Orrin Sage Sr. and was a challenge due to the rolling terrain and variable water pressure at the water meter location.

- Mid-1970s 110 acres southeast of Paradise Valley sold to Rockwell and became part of Area I (ranch from 760 acres to 628 acres). Continued cattle grazing on that portion until 1987.
- 1980 Orrin Sr. and Evelyn built a house and moved to Home Ranch (this is the current ranger house). Cattle, avocados and oranges were raised at the ranch and all thrived.
- 1987 The Sage Family lost the ranch because of Rocketdyne groundwater pollution where Rocketdyne would not indemnify the ranch from disclosure and were unwilling to purchase all or part of the ranch.
- 1987 Last cattle removed from the ranch. Ranch acquired by bank; later sold to Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and becomes a public park.

The narrative in Section 2 is accompanied by photographs, many of which are followed by additional comments, that describe what is being shown. The narrative and the comments are based on information that was provided by Orrin and Cindy Sage, unless otherwise indicated. The later part of the narrative will consist mostly of the comments on the photographs. The remainder of Section 2 will then describe the various historical access roads in the area, and then describe the former and current ranch buildings, structures, and etc.

According to Orrin Jr., "My dad (Figure 6) leased that area and more from the Dundas Family as a cattle ranch and later purchased the middle part of the larger ranch, which is now Sage Ranch Park. The ranch extended all the way from the Bell Canyon Ranch north to the railroad tracks in Simi Valley. The western property line was the Silvernale/Hall property (the fence line was just before the LOX Plant and is still there), which was part of the old Eddie Maier Ranch [now mostly the Brandeis]-Bardin Institute, which is immediately north of the SSFL] Later we ran cattle on the SSFL Buffer Zone [on what is now called the Southern Undeveloped Land] and the Ahmanson Ranch, Runkle Ranch, Montgomery Ranch, and China Flats to the west in the Simi Hills."

"There were several leases between NAA and the Dundas family that my dad was involved with as the Dundas representative. I recall that part of Tract A was leased from the Dundas' in 1947 by NAA. Several leases continued around the sold portion mostly for a security buffer and the north and southeast where the Sage Ranch operations were allowed to continue in conjunction with the NAA operations. We had cattle on the Silvernale property for several years after they left their ranch and prior to NAA beginning their facility development in earnest . . ." (personal communication 8/21/16). There were few written lease-agreements- the particulars were discussed in person, and the deal was sealed man-to-man . . . According to Orrin Sage "Believe it or not there were few written leases if any . . . My dad had a more formal lease with Rocketdyne for [what became] the south buffer zone but I do not have any copies. During the ranching period a handshake was good as gold with the ranchers in the Simi area" (personal Communication 11/2/2016). Once NAA begin operations, access to the top of the hill was curtailed by armed uniformed NAA (and later Rocketdyne) security personnel. There was a large silver gate and manned guard station at the bottom of Woolsey Canyon Road just west of Valley

Circle. There were also guard stations at the intersection of Woolsey Canyon and Black Canyon Roads at the top of the hill and at the bottom of Black Canyon Road at the edge of Santa Susana Knolls. The Albertson Motorway and North American Cut Off roads were closed and were gated and/or cabled (see photo Figure 3 below). Chain link gates were installed by NAA at the Arness Ranch fire road, Runkle Ranch and Bell C Ranch entrances to Paradise Valley and Burro Flats for more security. We had keys to the gates and the Sage's and Silvernale's were the only ones with approved access to their respective ranches. An old NAA lock is still on the chain where the Sages and Silvernales shared a ranch gate.



Figure 3
Orrin Sage Senior, wife Evelyn ca. 1965
Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

Comments on the photo:

- The vehicle was a 1965 Toyota Land Cruiser FJ 40.
- The painted rock in the background is a Santa Susana Fire Road.
- The gates (note that there are two) were placed by 1- Rocketdyne (a cable gate), and by 2- Southern California Edison.

The Sage family ran both steers (mostly for beef) and Holstein dairy replacement heifers, which were sold into the Chino dairy market. Their cattle operations extended beyond the boundary of Sage Ranch itself-the Sage family eventually ran about 1,000 head of cattle on about 15,000 acres, from Bell Canyon to China Flats, including the Rocketdyne Buffer Zone, and the top portions of the Ahmanson Ranch, Runkle Ranch, all of the Montgomery Ranch (Bridle Path), and China Flats in the Simi Hills. Also, on the north side of Simi Valley, in the Santa Susana Mountains, the Brea Canyon Union Oil Ranch, the Moreland Ranch, and parts of the Strathearn Ranch over Middle Ridge and into Happy Camp Canyon all the way to the Newhall Ranch fence line. Several springs and seasonal pools exist on the Sage Ranch, and various wells were drilled and used. Well #4, for example, is still present on the north side of the canyon, near the SW corner of the ranch, and Well 4a is still on the south side of the drainage (both of these wells are now used by Boeing for testing the water-quality in the upper drainage).

In addition to their cattle operations, the Sage family planted extensive orchards, beginning in the mid-1970s. The newly cleared hillsides at the southeast end of the ranch, and the recently planted citrus and avocado orchards, can be seen in the center of Figure 4. The same part of the ranch is also shown in Figure 5, which must be at least two springs later, since the trees have now leafed out, and the hillsides are green. Figure 8 shows Orrin Sr. putting out orange tree saplings in this part of the ranch in 1974. About 100 acres of avocados and citrus were planted, and fences had to be built before the orchards were planted to keep the cattle and horses out.

"The orchards were always watered with Ventura County District 17 water. We were in the process of hooking back up to Well 4A to augment the water supply because we had demand problems when Rocketdyne would pull more water from the District water line for their rocket engine cooling uses. Well 4A was drilled by NAA but was on our side of the property and was used as part of their water supply and our water trough prior to contamination. We had Edison put in electric power to the well, but prior to hook up, Rocketdyne informed us that we could not use the well water because of TCE contamination. Everything went to hell after that . . . Cattle trough water was from NAA or Rocketdyne (non-contaminated sources), or District 17 sources. Natural springs and creeks also provided cattle water" (Orrin Sage Jr., personal communication 12/16/2016). Based on his extensive scientific knowledge of the Ranch geology, Orrin Sage Jr. later served as an expert witness for Aetna Insurance Company against Rocketdyne over ground water contamination.



Figure 4
Sage Ranch ca. 1979, with newly planted orchards
Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

Figure 4 shows:

- The improved (early 1950s) Woolsey Canyon Road, at bottom left photo.
- Black Canyon Road, on lower and right side of photo.
- North American Cut-off, just visible at bottom right of photo.
- Ranch roads and new orchards in center and left center of photo.
- Newly cleared areas on top of hill (upper left of photo).
- Oak Flats in upper right of photo.



Figure 5
Sage Ranch ca. 1980. Orchards Beginning to Grow
Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

Figure 5 shows:

- Black Canyon Road, in center and bottom left of photo.
- Ranch road, bottom right to center of photo.
- Sage Ranch house, in upper right of photo.
- New now-growing orchards, L-R across middle of photo.
- Burro Flats and Silvernale Ranch (Sky Valley Ranch), in center distance.

When the Dundas family sold (1954) the acres that later became the facility entrances and main offices area for North American Aviation, that formed the core of what became Area I, it was still called "Paradise Valley." According to Orrin, there was good spring-fed cattle water in Area I Paradise Valley, which was a healthy live-oak woodland, which was cleared by North American Aviation for a parking lot and administrative buildings. This was, unfortunately, well-

prior to any requirement for any sort of environmental impact report, statement, mitigation, etc. So, in this case "they" did "pave Paradise and put up a parking lot." Figure 6 shows the result: the oak forest has been entirely destroyed, with no thought given to leaving even a few trees for landscaping or anything else.

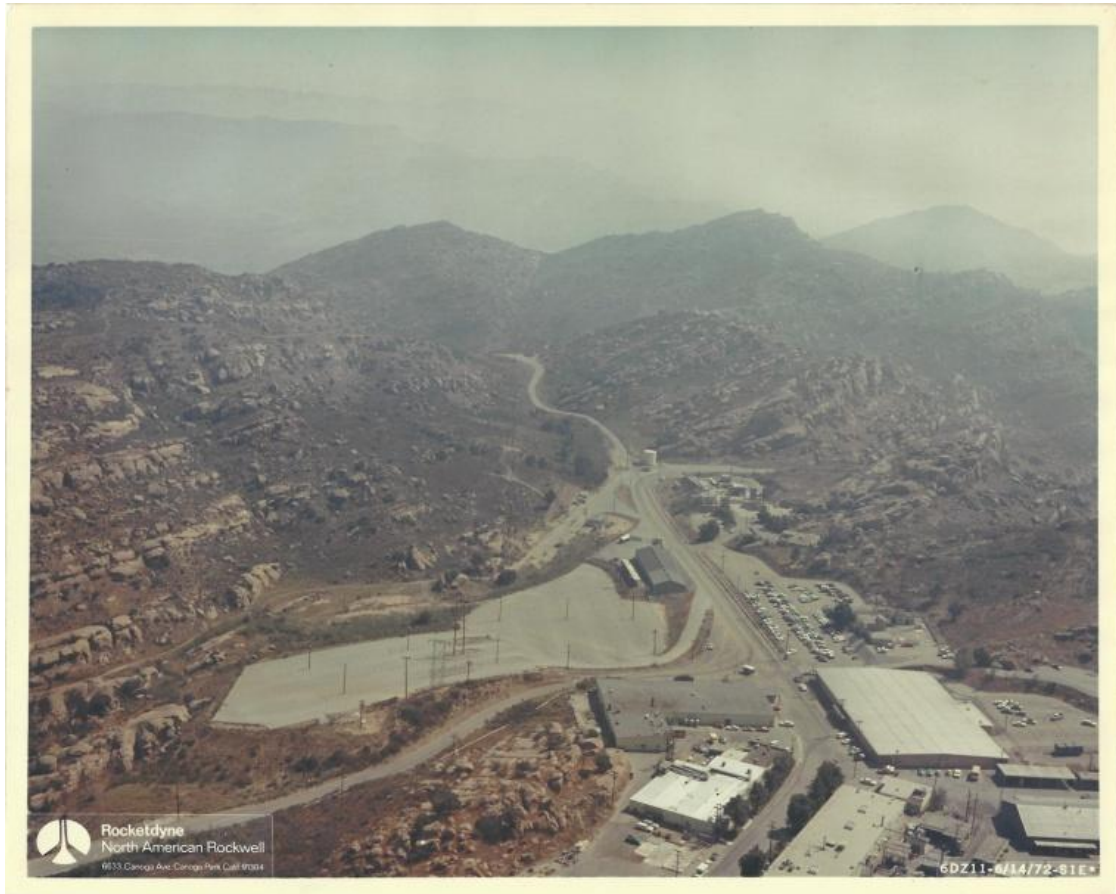


Figure 6
Paradise Valley ca. 1972
Photo by Rocketdyne.

Figure 6 shows:

- The Albertson Motorway, left center to lower left of photo, against hill; also in upper center of photo, where it emerges from the hills.
- The North American Aviation road, in bottom left of photo.
- The new facilities parking lot and buildings in (former) Paradise Valley.



Figure 7
 Brush Clearance at Oak Flats ca. 1974
 The Sage Ranch house would be built on knoll in left center photo
 Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

2.2 Upper Ranch Historic Features

The first motor vehicle road from the San Fernando Valley to Burro Flats began at today's Valley Circle Blvd., at the west end of Roscoe Blvd., in the west San Fernando Valley. This was the *Dayton Canyon Motorway* (hereafter DCM), which was a one lane dirt track that was used by local-traffic, including off-road trucks, jeeps, a few cars, and apparently one wagon train, for a movie during the 1940s. From the San Fernando Valley, at Valley Circle and Roscoe, the DCM went west, up Dayton Canyon, and then turned northwest and more-or-less went up the north fork of the canyon to just below (south of) what is now upper Woolsey Canyon Road. Well up the mountain, the old DCM and modern Woolsey Canyon Road follow the same route, until the top of the grade, where the DCM T-bones with the old *Albertson Motorway*, at Sage Ranch. The Albertson Motorway was the first east-west motor vehicle route to cross the Simi Hills uplands, from the northwest San Fernando Valley to the Thousand Oaks area.

The Silvernale and Hall families, who owned the Sky Valley Ranch to the west, also used the Albertson Motorway. According to Orrin Sage "I think that the Silvernales would have used the DCM to the top of the hill and then continue on the Albertson Motorway through Sage Ranch and to their red wooden gate that was located on the Albertson Motorway at our fence line. Our

pasture fences were set up to allow through access along the Albertson Motorway for the Silvernales and other ranches to the west. We used the Albertson Motorway through Burro Flats and further to the west to Thousand Oaks during our family ranching days. This was a more direct route than through the northern part of the Bell C Ranch (now the SSFL southern Undeveloped Land) . . . I know that Sally [Silvernale Ziegler] said that when North American Aviation completed Woolsey Canyon, that they [the Silvernale and Hall families] used that route for awhile before they left. The Albertson Motorway was cut off [at the southwest corner of Sage Ranch] by the construction of the LOX Plant and all traffic then used the paved NAA road from Area I to the west including to Burro Flats . . . "The Albertson Motorway has some old rock retaining walls on its old alignment that is shown on the 1945 map. The route was later [beginning in 1948] changed slightly by North American Aviation on the upper Sage Ranch" (Orrin Sage, personal communication 2016). This route later became known as the Albertson Fire Road.

Two other early routes also connected Sage Ranch with the rest of the world. These were the *North American Cut-off* (in background, Figure 8), which connected Pioneer Pass at Box Canyon Road (which runs between the northwestern San Fernando Valley and southeastern Simi Valley; this route is still a one-lane private dirt road today) with the Albertson, and *Black Canyon Road* (which runs between the western San Fernando Valley and southeastern Simi Valley; this 2-lane paved road is very steep and windy, but it is well-maintained and available to the public). The Albertson and other local ranch roads continued west, into and across the Silvernale/Hall *Sky Valley Ranch* (later SSFL Areas II, III, and IV), the northern part of the Bell C Ranch, and other private ranch properties. The distribution of the early ranch roads in the eastern Simi Hills can be seen on an undated late-1940s Automobile Club of Southern California map for *Los Angeles and Vicinity*. Ed Hall, whose family lived at the Sky Valley Ranch, to the west of Sage Ranch told Ray Vincent (of the Chatsworth Historical Society) that Ed's mother Bettye Knapp Hall complained about having to open and close the numerous cattle-gates along the way.



Figure 8
 Orrin Sr. Putting Out Valencia Orange Trees ca. 1974
 Photo by Cindy Sage

Comments on photo:

- The North American Cut-off (which runs between Box Canyon and Black Canyon roads) is visible in the background.
- Upper Black Canyon Road can be seen passing by the base of the twin power-line poles, behind and below Mr. Sage.

Orrin Jr. recalled that "Several hundred head of cattle were grazed by the Sage's and the Silvernale's. We had an old red cattle truck with a super compound low gear and large dual wheels that could crawl up just about any road along with a 1942 Army Jeep.. As kids, we would ride 1/2 dozen of our ranch horses from the Chatsworth Sage Ranch all the way up to the Simi Hills Sage Ranch on trails that avoided Woolsey Canyon Road and used parts of the Dayton Canyon Motorway and Albertson Motorway" (personal communication 2016). Also note that if one had a horse, the upper hills were still quite accessible for those who knew where they were going, well into the 20th century.

In regards to access by the filming industry (some 25 movies were filmed at Sky Valley Ranch, during the 1940s), the author asked Sage "How did the movie folks get their equipment and props to Sage and Sky Valley ranches? Dayton Motorway to Albertson Motorway? Did some of the movie folks assemble movie wagons somewhere other than on-site? On-site being

Burro Flats, etc.? Makes sense, I think. Easier to assemble the wagons and drive them up to the filming site, rather than take all of the equipment up there and build them on-site. Then, if that is the case, any guesses where the assembly work would have been done???" (AK to OS 5/15/2016). Sage replied: [There are] "Wagon ruts on the Dayton Canyon Motorway [which] are [still] visible . . . below Sage Ranch, off Woolsey Canyon . . . I presume that the wagons were trucked to Valley Circle and then driven up from the end of Roscoe? I think that the Runkle family may have provided some cattle and wagons that came up the Arness Fire Road from the Maier Ranch as well . . . We used steel rimmed water wagons and steel rimmed hay rakes on the ranch" (Orrin Sage, personal communication 5/17/16). But Sage also noted that their own ranch wagons were not used long enough to create "wagon ruts" in the dirt and/or bedrock ranch roads.



Figure 9
Gate at Albertson Motorway ca. 1974
Photo by Orrin Sage, Jr.

Comments on the photo:

- This gate was located on the Albertson Motorway, at the entrance to the bunkhouse area. This is the old motorway road alignment; the North American Aviation Road, when it was graded, would have continued west (to the left in the photo). past this part of the Albertson, on its way to the LOX plant (just outside of the SW corner of Sage Ranch).
- Question to OR from AK: "The warning sign is at your property line, but warning also applied to general area?" Orrin's reply: "Yep."



Figure 10
Albertson Motorway near
Head of South Fork of Sycamore Canyon ca. 1974
Photo by Orrin Sage, Jr.

Comment on photograph:

- Road at this time was maintained by Rocketdyne and Sage Ranch (i.e. Rocketdyne now had access to the LOX area beyond Sage Ranch, and had upgraded the Albertson Motorway in places, and had in a few relatively small areas, created a new route (both routes follow the flat ground north of the south fork of Sycamore Canyon).



Figure 11
Albertson Motorway/North American Aviation road
June 2016

Comment on the photo:

This recent photo shows linear scrape marks in the bedrock, which were created by a bull-dozer, when the old Albertson Motorway was up-graded or by-passed by NAA, so as to improve access to the LOX plant just outside of the southwest corner of Sage Ranch.

The Bunkhouse, the Cook Shack, and the Second Ranch House

According to Sage, the "Upper ranch has our old bunkhouse site and original corral and water trough site. Only a slab is left (Figure 26). . . [the] fencing and water troughs date from the 1940's to the 1980's . . . Cattle were moved by trail or trucked into the northern part of the ranch [from] near the RR tracks west of Black Canyon. The cattle were later brought up Woolsey Canyon Road to the Woolsey Canyon Corrals. We would periodically close Woolsey Canyon Road and/or Black Canyon Road to herd cattle from one area of the ranch to the other. Rocketdyne would cooperate and supply security vehicles to close roads to traffic."



Figure 12
Bunkhouse 1 ca. 1974
Photo by Cindy Sage

Comments on the photo:

- The "S" Sage Ranch brand/symbol (a lazy diamond with a S in the middle) is incised into the rock in foreground (Figure 18).
- The trimmed-up trees in front of the bunkhouse are Coast Live Oak.
- A family fruit orchard, pine trees, and eucalyptus trees were also planted in the bunkhouse area.



Figure 13
Thanksgiving at the Bunkhouse 2 ca. 1975
Photo by Cindy Sage

Comments on the photo, by Cindy Sage:

- Figure 13 shows a Thanksgiving Day party circa 1975, with hay bales for seating and pumpkins for decoration. A pit BBQ for Thanksgiving Dinner held two turkeys and a ham. It took a full day to dig, and a full day to cook. 40 people came to dinner. All the side dishes were cooked on a wood-burning stove in the cook shack. A typical ranch meal might consist of ranch-raised beef, and ranch-hunted venison and include Cindy's baked goods from a wood-burning stove. City folks would be fed rocky mountain oysters and rattlesnake as a novelty.
- The family and some of the ranch cowboys used the cook shack on a regular basis. Pierce College agricultural department faculty and friends from the 40's-on visited. Lindsay and Ed Boggess of Pierce College brought their ag [agriculture] classes to the Ranch. University of California Santa Barbara Geology and Environmental Studies faculty and students often visited in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Orrin and Cindy brought their UCSB Environmental Studies classes to the ranch to camp out, learn field mapping techniques, and geologic and biological resource identification and mapping.
- Guests, like the Silvernales, would join the family on occasion. Usually we would visit the Silvernale's during the time they had the pet bobcat. We would ride horses over or drive in the 1942 Army Jeep to Burro Flats.

- The photo was taken before the cook shack and kids' room was added. Just a 12' by 20' bunkhouse with sleeping loft, and a single wood-burning stove, and a three-sided shower room with a claw-footed tub and homemade hot water boiler - solar panel existed in 1975. The wood for much of this residence came from the old Santa Barbara Presbyterian Church on Anapamu Street. Orrin and Cindy saw the lumber (2" by 12" rough cut cedar planking) coming off the church, and quickly arranged to have it picked up and transported to the Ranch. It was transformed into the flooring and subfloors for the cook shack, decking and walkways, and kids' room and the open deck that joined them together.



Figure 14
Buck Rake with Cook Shack in Background ca. 1978
Photo by Cindy Sage

Comment on the photo:

- The Buck Rake was used to rake cut hay into windrows (rows, to facilitate collecting)
- The buck rake could be drawn with a tractor or a Jeep
- The cook shack can be seen behind the buck rake



Figure 15
Bunkhouse after improvements, ca. 1974
Photo by Cindy Sage

Comments on the photo:

- The Albertson Motorway can be seen in the foreground.
- The bunkhouse had homemade solar panels and a oak wood-fed boiler for hot water, which were built from ranch WW II-era copper pipes.



Figure 16
Interior of Cook Shack ca. 1975
Photo by Cindy Sage

Comments on the photo:

-This was the cook shack that was built adjacent to and north of the Bunkhouse, where we would eat. It had "chain-saw carpentry with handmade window doors." The cook shack became the main kitchen; we had a hand-painted Belgian wood-burning stove (with heated water storage and warming ovens). A deck off the back of the cook shack faced the orchard in back.

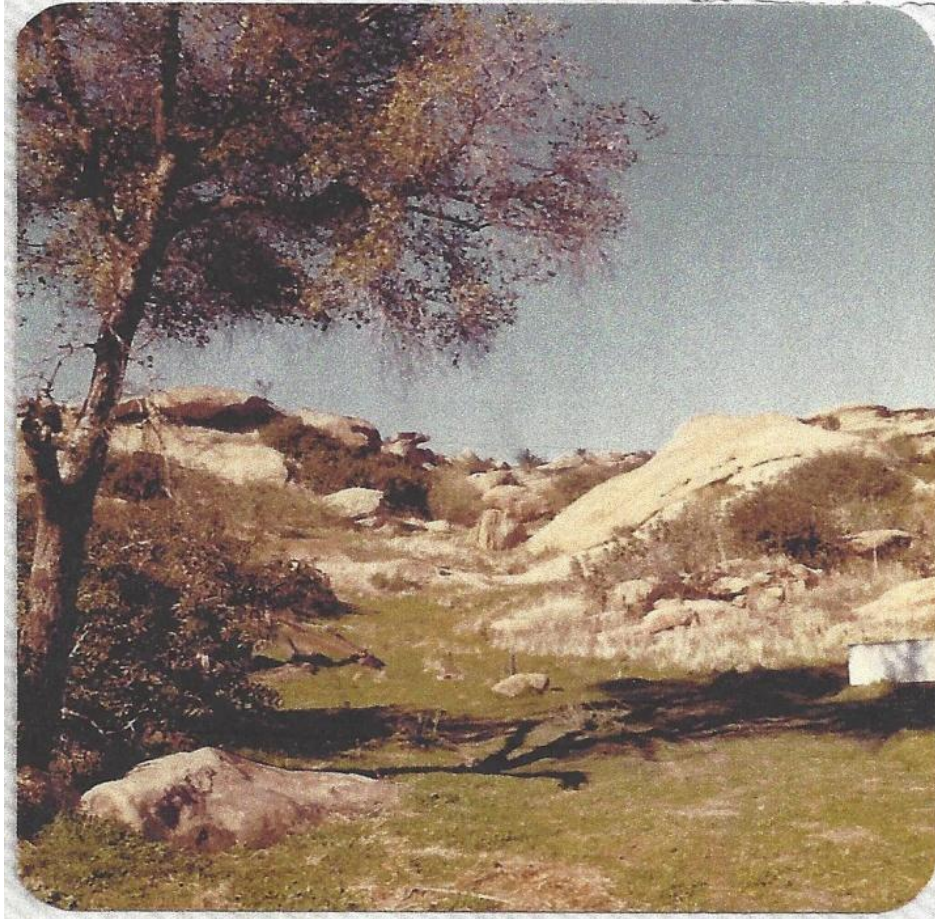


Figure 17

Cattle Trough in Area North of Bunkhouse - Installed in late 1940s
Photo by Orrin Sage, Jr.

Comments on the photo:

- The trough was a coffin vault that we brought up the Dayton Canyon Motorway, to the ranch, in our old red cattle truck.



Figure 18
Sage Ranch Brand - Carved in Rock Near Bunkhouse
Photo by Albert Knight

Comments on the photo:

- "The Sage Ranch cattle brand was a "lazy diamond S." The diamond symbol was on its side with an upright S in the center of the lazy diamond." Figure 18 shows a equilateral diamond, about 6-7 inches on a side, with an S on the inside, which was incised into the top of a boulder close-by the Bunkhouse site, by some of the Sage ranch cowboys, ca. 1955. It was carved after one of the cattle round ups.



Figure 19
Barn at Oak Flat ca. 1975
Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

Comments on the photo:

- The barn was used for storage, and was part of the cattle-working cattle, along with associated corrals.
- Santa Ana winds would remove part of roof now and then. Sheet steel recycled from LOX Plant.
- The barn was removed by the MRCA, as was the bunkhouse, the cook shack, etc.



Figure 20
 Family 1952 US Army Truck
 Stuck in Mud at Oak Flat during mid-1970s El Nino
 Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

In December of 2016 Orrin Sage said the following, concerning life at Sage Ranch: "Life was pretty much hard work considering the cattle operations on the edges of Simi Valley and the orchard work. I would come home to the bunkhouse at the end of a 12-hour day and not have much in the way of stories to tell [I take this to mean that there was usually not a great detail of variation in the daily routine]. Pretty much was the same with the neighboring ranch owners like the Runkle's that plain worked hard. A day would start at dawn, catch the horses (usually two), load them in the stock trailer and head for one of the ranches, ride most of the day or be in a 4-wheeler. Move cattle to one of the corrals of which we had many, sort out the cows that were ready to calve and bring them back to the home ranch where they would then be taken by stock trailer to Chino where they would be sold at a good price as "springers" (dairy heifers that were just about to calve). Beef cattle were originally rounded up and taken to the Chatsworth Ranch (1940s - 1960s) and then commercially trucked to the LA stockyards for sale; the Silvernale's had a similar approach. Believe it or not, LA had a huge stockyard in the Vernon area and a large horse sales market as well, where Henry Silvernale bought horses. "



Figure 21
 Cindy Sage and daughter Stephanie
 at Bunkhouse sitting on Buck Rake in 1978
 Photo by Orrin Sage, Jr.

Orrin Continued: "Wildlife sightings were common with herds of deer in the Simi Hills prior to the 118 Freeway. Amy and I coasted a 4-wheeler within 50 feet of a hunting mountain lion pair on the summit of Big Mountain on the Strathearn Ranch. The area has changed so much over the years that it is hard to imagine. In the 1950s there were no stop lights in Simi Valley and very few lights. We would sit on a rock overlooking both the Simi and west San Fernando valleys, and they would be dark at night. There was no 118 freeway, no 405 or 101 freeway, just Los Angeles Avenue [in Simi Valley], Santa Susana Pass Road [between eastern Simi Valley and the western San Fernando Valley], and Topanga Canyon, Sepulveda Blvd., and Ventura Blvd. [in the San Fernando Valley]. Calabasas was in the middle of nowhere with one steakhouse restaurant called Eckberg's. In Chatsworth there was the Town and Country Cafe and the Log Cabin Cafe to eat at, and the Chatsworth Market to shop.

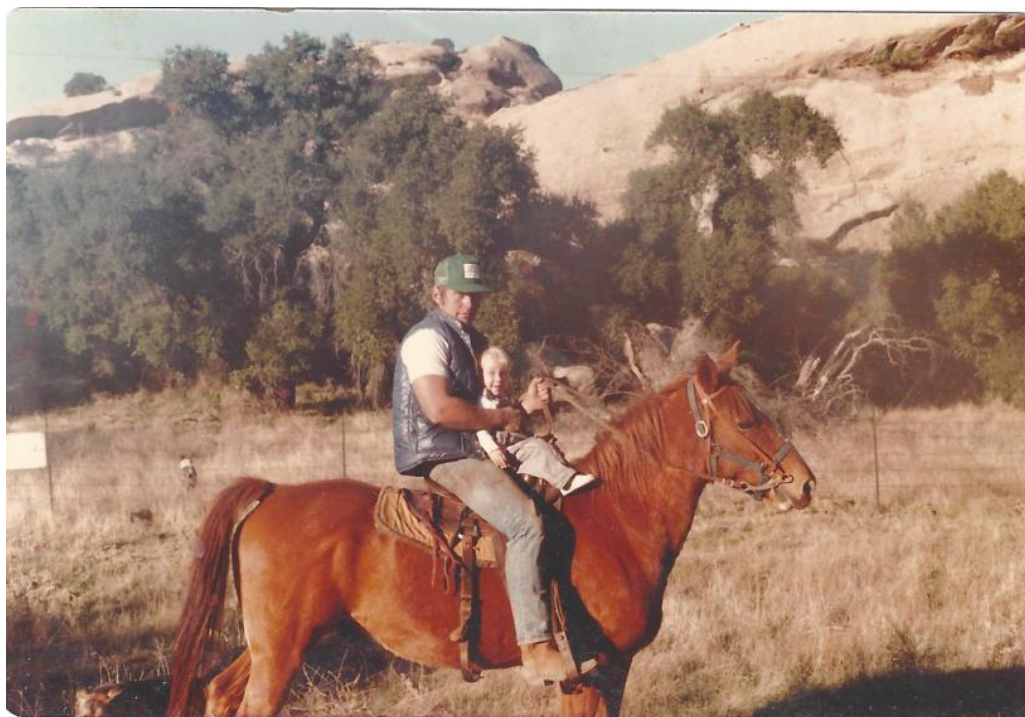


Figure 22

Orrin Sage, Jr. with daughter Stephanie, horse Harley and dog Chia - 1980
Photo by Cindy Sage

"Our ranch beef and venison would be taken to Canoga Locker to be cut up and packaged after we did the field dressing. Thousand Oaks was still open space with the Albertson Ranch, which became Westlake Village. Private ranchers controlled trespass, which helped protect the resources of the area until development started, and then it started to be hard to control- with illegal access from the urban areas. In retrospect, agencies acquiring the ranch lands was probably a good thing, as far as controlling trespass. The only sad thing is fuel buildup and hotter wildfires without cattle management of the open-space lands. Brandeis is really now the last refuge for horse and cattle grazing . . . much as it was the last Chumash refuge that Bud Taylor saw in the 1880s (see below)."

Orrin also told the author that: "Wildfires were a common experience every few years. During Santa Ana Wind conditions we would see a fire start northeast of Chatsworth in the Santa Susana Mountains or in the San Fernando Pass and it would typically burn to the ocean. We knew we had a few hours to round up cattle and horses into corrals that could be protected or placed on the Paradise Valley rocketdyne parking lot. Rooftop sprinklers would be turned on the barn and bunkhouse areas. Portable gas pumps would be used along with a 2 1/2 ton ranch pumper truck. We would first be engulfed with smoke and then hear the burning brush and see the flames, and the fire would burn through the ranches. We never lost any structures, although fences and trees would burn. Once, we lost about 30 head of cattle that burned up in Dayton Canyon. One particular fire in the early 1980's was especially troublesome. For five days the various ranches were on fire. The fire burned west along the Santa Susana Mountains to Moorpark and also jumped Highway 118 into the Simi Hills and burned across Highway 101 all

the way to Malibu. Ventura County fire fighters and the Rocketdyne protective services fire department were really helpful by dozing fire breaks around corrals and placing pumper trucks at corrals and ranch structures to stop the flames. The good news was less brush and more green cattle forage in the spring. Today the wildfires are much more destructive due to increased urbanization and fuel build up. Oak woodland, riparian woodland and native grasslands are especially vulnerable to hot wildfires and tree loss due to fuel build up. From old ranch photos, Oak Flats, Burro Flats, and China Flats were much more 'park like' when cattle were grazed in those and other oak woodland areas in the Simi Hills."



Figure 23
Orrin Sage Jr. and Daughters Amy and Stephanie
Photo by Cindy Sage

Figure 26 shows Amy Sage (back) and Stephanie Sage (middle) and their dad (Orrin Sage Jr.) (front) going for their horses and pony on the old Silvernale Ranch (north part of Area II) in 1985. Pre-school for the Sage kids was often on horseback or ATV or in the ranch trucks. Willie Chamberlin of the Santa Ynez Valley Chamberlin Ranch loaned their family pony to the Sage girls for some years. Shadow, the Chamberlin pony stayed with the Sages for four or five years before returning home to Santa Ynez.

2.3 Lower Ranch Historic Features

Working corrals also existed at the north end of the ranch, on Black Canyon Road. "Sage fencing dates back to the 1940's to the 1980's; [there was an] old loading chute and holding pen . . . to the left of the gate [on Black Canyon Road]. The dirt road off of Black Canyon with rocks blocking it was used by Sage Ranch, and the whole lower valley was cleared and farmed in hay crops and grazed by cattle from the 1940's to the 1980's . . . The old spring and old trough is in the canyon below the lower gate and loading chute . . . We boxed it in years ago. In addition to the loading chute and the holding pen, some of the old fences can still be seen along the north side of the ranch, and in places, along Black Canyon Road. We had numerous other corrals and water troughs along the Albertson Motorway and on Woolsey Canyon; in the Buffer Zone; at the Runkle Ranch windmill; on the lower Montgomery Ranch; and on China Flats" (Orrin Sage, personal communication 2016).

It can also be noted that there are small seasonal pools and a waterfall in the canyon bottom on the north side of the ranch. The Sage family, their friends, and other non-family locals, sometimes used these pools to swim in during hot weather. One of the uninvited people was the infamous Charlie Manson, who was living at the near-by Spahn Ranch, along with other members of the "Manson Family. As Orrin tells the tale: "One day in the late spring of 1969, we found a heavily armed man in camouflage clothing hunting in the valley on the north part of the ranch. We escorted him off the ranch, walking behind him with our hunting rifles. A month or so later, the Tate-LaBianca murders happened in Los Angeles. Not too long after that, a photo appeared in the LA Times showing 'suspect in Tate murders captured.' It was a photo of Charles Manson, the man we had run off the ranch at gunpoint. As the story unfolded, he and his 'family' had been living several miles to the north, on the Old Spahn Ranch, off Santa Susana Pass. It helped to explain the several instances that year where dune buggy tracks were found on the northern part of the ranch, and our gates taken down to gain access" (Orrin Sage, personal communication 2016).

2.4 Other Area Ranches and Their Owners

The Simi Hills were part of the Rancho Simi Mexican Land Grant that was eventually subdivided into Tract A, B, C, and D. Tract A was the Maier Ranch; the upper part became the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch, and the lower part became Brandeis-Bardin Institution. Many of the Simi Hills ranches were still running cattle until the 1960s, and included the Bell C Ranch (south of the SSFL), and properties that the Hearst family had owned, including what later became the Crummer-Ahmanson Ranch, Cheseboro Canyon, Palo Comado (Jordan Ranch), and the Russell-Albertson Ranch (now Westlake Village and North Ranch subdivisions). On the Simi Valley side of the Simi Hills the Runkle Ranch, Montgomery Ranch, and Wood Ranch were also in active ranching into the 1960's and 1970's. The most important of these ranches are listed, but not discussed here (but see Section 4- The Last refuge, below).

Maier (Edward R. "Eddie" Maier, owner of Maier Brewing Company in Los Angeles)
The Maier Ranch was became the (lower northern part) the Brandeis-Bardin Institute and the (upper southern part), including Burro Flats, became the Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch.

Mortimer

1920s Mortimer acquired about 1,800 acres of "Track A" from the old Simi Land grant. Mortimer developed the small lower portion as "Mortimer Park", which later became known as Susana Knolls.

Ahmanson

This ranch was bought from the **Crummer family**, who had bought it from the Barrett family, who had bought it from the famous **William Randolph Hearst**, who owned large ranches in the Simi Hills, early in the 20th century, including the Russell Ranch, and the Ahmanson Ranch, and also large parts of the Palo Comado/Chesebro Canyon area.

Jim and Mary Jordan (stage names Fibber McGee and Molly)

These well-known radio personalities owned China Flats and Palo Comado Canyon, after Hearst ownership. China Flats and area was later owned by Bob Hope, and the Sage family ran cattle at China Flats, in the 1970 and 1980s.

Ida Dundas' Ranch

John Dundas was Ida's son, he worked for Douglas Aircraft and was good friends with Orrin Sage, Sr. They acquired that land, including part of what later became Sage Ranch from Mortimer, during the 1920s or 1930s. In 1947 North American Aviation bought the upper portion of the Dundas property, which became part of Area I. At that time Orrin Sr. was using the property for Sage Ranch cattle.

Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch

This ranch, or the area where it was located, is generally called "Burro Flats." But Burro Flats- a distinct place with its own geographical name- actually only covers a small part of the ranch. Henry Silvernale, who founded the ranch, along with his friend Bill Hall, called it "Sky Valley Ranch." The ranch existed from the late 1930s until 1954. SSFL Areas II, III, and IV were developed from Sky Valley Ranch land.

Bob Hope

The old Crash Corrigan "Corriganville" Movie Ranch at the western (Simi Valley side) of Santa Susana Pass was purchased by Bob Hope in 1965, and the area became known as "Hopetown." The western side, facing the valley, was developed into residential housing, while the main part of the ranch, in the mouth of the canyon, became a City of Simi Valley historical park.

Other near-by Simi Hills ranches included the Jordan Ranch in Palo Comado Canyon (and including China Flats), and the Runkle Ranch along Rocky Peak above (north of) Hopetown. The Runkle's also owned the ranch west of the Silvernale/Hall ranch and the Maier Ranch (the area is still known as the Runkle ranch). Jim Arness (Marshall Matt Dillon of the TV Gunsmoke series) purchased about 1,000 acres of the western portion of the Maier Ranch, north

of the Silvernale Ranch, for cattle. He later gifted the ranch to Brandeis-Bardin (after Brandeis-Bardin acquired the Maier Ranch). The access road south from Simi Valley, through Brandeis-Bardin, and up-canyon as far as the SSFL, is still known as the Arness Fire Road.

People that worked for the Sage Ranches over the years included Don Pitman who also owned the Chatsworth Market, Dave and Terry Jetton whose parents owned the Chatsworth Town and Country Café, Chuck and Doug Furbotton, Gary Galvin, Rusty Johnson (Hearst Cowboy), Brandall Horney, and Big Sid and Little Sid Averill and lots of day help, along with Pierce College faculty and rodeo cowboys, and friends.

Some of the ranch neighbors that we had ties with included the Haberfelds (Rim Rock Ranch); Johnny and Wendy Varble (Arness Ranch and Brandeis ranch manager); Dale and Velma Worline (Barclay and Maier Ranch manager); Estelle Maier (Maier Ranch); Jim, Ralph, and Dewey Runkle (Runkle Ranch); Doc Silvernale (Sky Valley Ranch); Homer Cockrum (Bell C Ranch); Bob and Ed Erro (Basque sheep owners Crummer and Ahmanson Ranch); Roy Morrison (Morrison Family Ranch Las Virgenes); Cliff Holmes (Palo Comado Hope Ranch manager); Bill Galbraith (Chesebro-Morrison Ranch manager); Harlan Brown (last Albertson Ranch manager who later managed the Hearst San Simeon Ranch); Doc Montgomery (Montgomery Ranch); Buddy and Cynthia Wood (Wood Ranch); and Bob and Bruce Strathearn (Strathearn Ranch). Local veterinarians included Docs Baker and Harder.

A good example of working together was with Bill Galbraith. We had been missing 10 heifers after a terrific rainstorm and searched for them with no luck. About three months later Bill called and said he had 10 very fat heifers in his lower corral on the Morrison Ranch in Agoura that he had found in a remote area of his ranch.

3. Archaeology Sites

Several Native American archaeological sites are present at Sage Ranch, and a number of prehistoric artifacts have been recovered. These include a slate pendant, four bone awls, a stone bowl, and a stone pipe with the bird-bone mouth-piece still in place, and the basal portion of a basket. All of these artifacts are curated at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, as discussed under individual site entries, below. In addition, bedrock mortars are present at 56-001119, and several lithic artifacts have been observed at recorded and unrecorded places on the ranch.

A. Owl Cave (CA-VEN-1050)

This site consists of a small cave where Owl's and other birds roost; the entire floor of the cave is covered in Owl pellets, and much of the walls and the floor are heavily splattered with guano. A Turkey-Vulture feather was seen in the cave, and numerous swallows were nesting in the cave and in adjacent rock shelters in 1991. The Site was recorded by Knight (1991). An incised pendant, that appears to be made from slate, was recovered from a small natural sandstone shelf in the back of the cave, and one quartzite scrapper and one quartzite flake were observed on the floor of the cave, but not collected (Knight 1991, 1997:8). The pendant was

transferred from the MRCA to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Department of Anthropology in January 2015, where it is curated under Accession No. B6312.

Owl cave is adjacent to a unique geological slump-fold feature in the Chatsworth formation sandstone as described in detail by Sage (1971), as seen in Figure 24. This site was a favorite destination for UCSB and other college and university geology professors and students, since they are world-class geologic features. The fact that Great-horned Owls have long nested in caves in this big outcrop add to the uniqueness of the area.

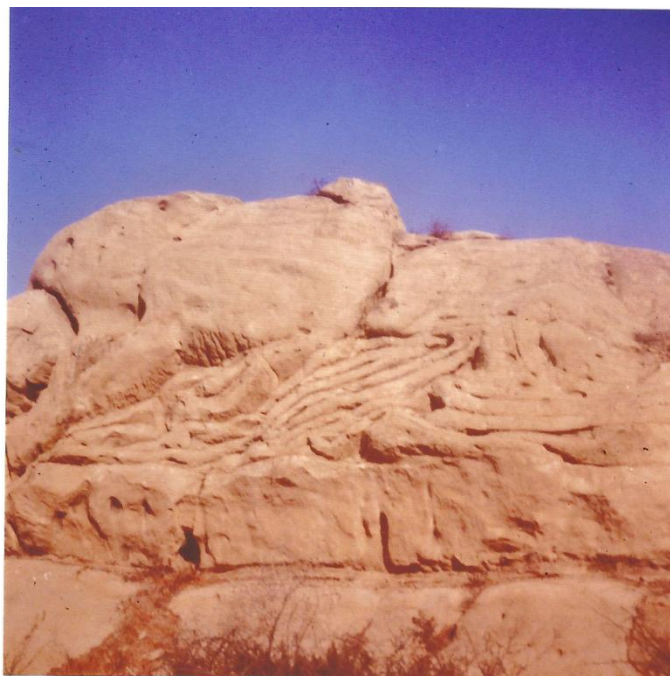


Figure 24
Geologic Fold in Chatsworth Formation Near Owl Cave
Photo by Orrin Sage Jr.

B. Upper South Fork Sycamore Canyon (CA-VEN-1119)

This site consists of two bedrock mortars and one possible cupule (Knight 1993, 1997:8). The site is well-hidden in a large rock formation, in the upper drainage of the south fork of Sycamore Canyon; the BRMS are located adjacent to a small seasonal pool. Ground visibility at the time that the site was recorded was very poor, due to thick brush and down-leaves, etc. The site is located in an area that was subject to an Environmental Remediation clean-up, due to area contamination by being the down-range portion of a skeet-shooting facility.

C. Oak Flats Rockshelter (CA-VEN-1568)

This site is located in what is now the Sage Ranch Park Group Campground. During the early 1960's Orrin Sage Jr. recovered a small cache of artifacts from one of the rockshelter in this area. The artifacts include four bone awls, a small stone bowl, and a stone pipe with the bird-bone mouthpiece still in place. The Sage family donated the artifacts to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Department of Anthropology in March 1999, where they are curated under Accession #B4914. The site was recorded by Knight with the assistance of Orrin Sage (1998a). The bowl is illustrated in Johnson (1997:15), the four bone awls are illustrated in Johnson (1997:16), and the pipe is illustrated in Johnson 1997:19).

D. North Fork Sycamore Canyon Cave (CA-VEN-1569)

This site is a small cave which is located just north of the northwestern edge of Sage Ranch, adjacent to the upper north-fork of Sycamore Canyon. During the early 1960's Orrin Sage Jr. recovered the base of a basket from one of the rockshelters in this area. The Sage family donated the artifact to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Department of Anthropology in March 1999, where it is curated with Accession #B4914. The fragment is described as "The base of a Chumash basket . . . Basket base is 25.5 x 24 cm (10.25 x 10 in)" and it is illustrated in Johnson (1997:10). The site was recorded by Knight with the assistance of Orrin Sage (1998b), and the site record notes that the fragment is "part plant material and part historic cloth." This comment was made based on a personal examination of the fragment, by Dr. John Johnson, Curator of Anthropology at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and who accompanied Sage and Knight during the field visit. In addition, there are several unrecorded bedrock mortars in the bottom of the drainage, below the site.

E. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Site (CA-VEN-1570)

This site consists of the letters "CCC," which are incised into a small boulder, on the east side of Black Canyon Road, near the northeast edge of the ranch (Figure 25). The site was recorded by Knight with the assistance of Orrin Sage (1998c). Sage reminded the author that "Access to the Sage Ranch and SSFL was also from Black Canyon Road from Santa Susana . . . This road was built by the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] in the 1930's . . . and is still in use today" (personal communication, 2016). The "CCC" is not deeply incised, and although it is fairly obvious when the sun is at a low angle, in is difficult to see in bright sunlight. The site was revisited and photographed in May 2016.

For those that are not familiar with the area, it should be pointed out that Black Canyon forms the northern end of a quite steep, little known, and narrow "short cut," between the southeast corner of Simi Valley, and the head of Woolsey Canyon, in the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley. The two steep canyons, and roads, meet near the southeast corner of Sage Ranch, where they both intersect the old Albertson Motorway.

According to local historian Mike Kuhn: "An old Spanish trail existed over the hill from the San Fernando Valley side down from the top of Woolsey Canyon and down through a hanging valley that is about half way up Black Canyon Road and down through the east branch of Meier Canyon into Simi Valley. I have seen horseshoes and a number of Spanish names carved in the rocks along the way. Orrin Sage, Jr., the former owner of the Sage Ranch, reported his memory of a large stylized cross (Basque design with vertical "ends" carved in the cross bar of the cross) carved into the cavity of a large oak tree in the hanging valley. He indicated that the tree was destroyed in a brush fire. There is an old story relating to the use of that trail during the 1830s. It is likely that the trail was used by the Indians, because it would have afforded travelers access to water most of the year."



Figure 25
Al Knight at CA-VEN-1570
Photo by Ray Vincent



Figure 26
The Bunkhouse Site in 2016
Photo by Albert Knight

4. The Last Refuge

Although the location described in the following story is not part of Sage Ranch, it is just outside of the ranch, and is of special importance for local history. The story is called "The Last Refuge." Without discussing this story in detail, it is- for now- adequate to say that the story is of considerable interest, and that it will be the focus of future research in the area surrounding Sage Ranch. Orrin Sage, who knows the location mentioned in the story, provided some comments, which follow the story. The story concerns one of the last times that Chumash Indians were observed hunting in the Sage Ranch area, as described in a short letter, called *The Last Refuge*. This story was related by a man named Bud Taylor, who was a founding member of one of the early Anglo-American settler families in Simi Valley. The version presented here was provided to the author by Mike Kuhn, a local historian and a former environmental planner for the City of Simi Valley; the gist of the story is briefly mentioned by Murphy (1979:224-225). The story is pertinent to our trying to understand the fate of the old Indian community, so it will be quoted in full:

"Bud O. L. Taylor came to Ventura County in 1866 when he was six years old. After spending time in Ventura, his family moved to Nevada. In 1874 he moved to Simi Valley, where he worked as a teamster, grain rancher and cattleman. One day during the late-1870s he was looking for cattle in the far reaches of Meier Canyon, when he came upon a small cluster of Chumash huts. They were not occupied at the time. The newspaper account, the text of which was provided to me by City

Historian Pat Havens, does not record where in Meier Canyon his discovery was made. However, based upon physical evidence, I am certain that I stumbled upon the site. Way back in a remote section of the canyon is a place where there is nearly always water. A nice flat area is present near the water. It is possible that the site represented a well-hidden refuge for Indians, who wished to avoid capture into the mission system or who had escaped from the mission system and who wanted to continue to pursue their traditional way of life. During the mission and rancho periods such a remote area was unlikely to have been visited. Rancho Simi was primarily a sheep and cattle operation. There is little graze for sheep or cattle deep in the steep-walled canyon, which is covered by chaparral. Sheep were accompanied by a shepherd. They were not allowed to free range."

"Notes have been discovered in the archives of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History from the files of Dr. Charles Rozaire, Curator of Archaeology. They were not identified as to source, but a good guess is that the research was done by Richard Van Valkenburgh in the early 1930s. At that time he and his staff interviewed the listed informants, one of whom was Bud Taylor. Taylor remembered a band of about 35 Indians that lived in "Spring Canyon" on what is now the Brandeis-Bardin campus of the American Jewish University. He stated that they were living in brush houses (elsewhere in the notes he describes them as "grass-covered" houses) and in rock shelters (elsewhere described as two large caves) as late as 1878. One of those caves was probably one that is in another branch of Meier Canyon. He also reported that in the fall they would come down to the valley floor to gather acorns. While the various notes are somewhat confusing, they imply that they left the canyon for Ventura in 1879. However, they returned in the fall of each year to Simi to gather acorns. This may have been the same group that is reported (personal communication during the late-1970s with the octogenarian daughter of the original owner of that ranch) to have camped for many years as late as the 1920s each fall on a ranch where Willowbrook Lane is today, while they gathered acorns in the valley. A little more than half way between Royal Avenue and the Arroyo Simi I found evidence of a substantial campsite that contained the remains of the use of the site by Chumash Indians. The site also contained remains of items from the historical period."

"When I found what I now am certain was Spring Canyon, and downstream from the suspected site of the grass-covered houses, I was greeted by an old hand painted sign about 20 feet up on the west wall of the canyon. The sign read: "Lost Canyon - discovered by Bud Taylor." I doubt that the sign could have been more than 10 years old. I asked Johnny Varble, the ranch manager and descendant of several pioneer families, about the sign. He said that he had no recollection of seeing it and had no memory of the story of Bud Taylor's discovery. (In his youth, he had known Bud Taylor.) Was the story of his discovery, so many years after most of the Indians were gone, passed down within a pioneer family and somehow commemorated? The sign itself may have been silent testimony of a day more than 130 years ago when a local rancher made a tantalizing discovery that bore witness to the last days of a group's hold on their old way of life."

Orrin Sage made the following comments on the Bud Taylor story: "There are two areas in upper Meier Canyon that fit the description. The upper most part of the canyon is where the caves and bedrock mortars are at the waterfall on our old ranch [i.e. at CA-VEN-1569; in the north fork of Sycamore Canyon] . . . The other area is at the base of what we called Big Canyon [i.e. the south fork of Sycamore Canyon], which starts at our old ranch and flows west . . . makes an abrupt right angle turn to the north, and comes out into Sycamore Canyon [proper]. There is a flat area about 1/4 mile upstream (where the canyon gradient levels out) from the Sycamore Canyon confluence, that Brandeis used for camping; they built a pond there as well. A perfect hidden site with abundant water and shelter that would have been an ideal spot." Assuming that Bud Taylor's recollections were accurate, this *Last Refuge* may have been one of the last places in eastern Ventura County

where members of the historical Native Americans community could get away from the settlers and enjoy their own company.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Orrin and Cindy Sage (former owners of Sage Ranch); this report on the history of Sage ranch would not have been possible without their considerable help. Thanks also to John Johnson (Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History), who introduced the author to Mr. and Mrs. Sage, and who assisted in making sure that the CA-VEN-1568 and CA-VEN-1569 were recorded, way back in the late 20th Century. Ray and Ann Vincent, who own the near-by White Oak Ranch, helped re-explore and re-located the five currently recorded archaeology sites on the ranch during 2016, and Ray edited multiple draft versions of the report. Rorie Skei, Paul Edelman, and Ranger Tim Miller, of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, which owns and operates Sage Ranch Park, facilitated access to the Park. And lastly, thanks to Mike Kuhn, who provided the author with the "Last Refuge" story.

Postscript:

The Sage Ranch operated for nearly 50 years. The Ranch exists now in name only. Much of the ranch land is now public open space or was converted long ago to urban uses. The continued conversion of ranch land to urban uses was always evident in the west San Fernando Valley and Simi Valley, which shaped our family desire to help to preserve ranch land.

Orrin Sr., and Evelyn Sage are interred at the Oakwood Memorial Park at the end of Lassen Street in Chatsworth where they overlook their Sage Chatsworth Ranch site.

Orrin Jr. and Cindy Sage continue to work with ranchers and land trust organizations in California and Western Nevada to preserve ranch lands in perpetuity through the establishment of conservation easements.

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