

THE HISTORY OF SKY VALLEY RANCH, VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

by Albert Knight
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Dad on Silver

Figure 1
Henry Silvernale on Silver

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **Sky Valley Ranch History**
3. **Burro Flats Painted Cave**
4. **Movies**
5. **Santa Susana Field Laboratory**

References Cited

Figures

1. Henry Silvernale on his Horse Silver
2. Calabasas 7.5 Topographic Map of Burro Flats
Silvernale House Circled in Blue, Hall House Circled in Red
3. (L-R) Bill Hall, Henry Silvernale, Beulah Silvernale, Rex Silvernale, Marcia Silvernale
McGillis
4. Max Silvernale, Bill Hall, Johnny Hall, and Rex Silvernale in 1928 (pre-ranch)
5. Bettye Knapp Hall, Bill Hall, and Blue
6. Burro Flats in the 1940s, Looking Southeast towards Silvernale Ranch House.
7. Bill Hall (L) and Henry Silvernale (R)
8. Henry Silvernale (L), Blue (center), Bill Hall (R)
9. Bill Hall, son Ed Hall
10. Henry Silvernale and Bobbie, the Family's Pet Bob-cat
11. Burro Flats Air-photo with windrows (1947)
Silvernale House Circled in Blue, Hall House Circled in Red
12. Bill Hall and Son Ed in Ranch Pool
13. Sky Valley Ranch Letterhead Stationary
14. "Burro Flats" Silvernales/Hall Ranch Sign
15. The Original Silvernale Ranch House in Burro Flats - Distance View
16. The Original Silvernale Ranch House in Burro Flats - Close-up
17. The Improved Silvernale Ranch House in Burro Flats - Mid-range View
18. The Improved Silvernale Ranch House in Burro Flats
19. Main Room of Silvernale Ranch House
Looking West, Out of the End Window seen in Figures 16 and 17
20. Main Room of Silvernale Ranch House
Looking East, Inside of the Living Room, with End Window Behind Photographer
Note Painted Vine on L-R Board above Painting, Above the Fireplace
21. Fragments of Interior of Silvernale House as Seen in Figure 20
Same Painted Vine Pattern Seen in Figure 20
22. Seen of Wagon Trail in Burro Flats, from Movie *California* (1947)
23. The Santa Susana Field Laboratory at Height of Operations in 1988
(Courtesy U.S. Department of Energy)

1. Introduction

This paper is intended to describe the short-lived *Sky Valley Ranch*, which was founded by Henry W. Silvernale (Figure 1), and William (Bill) Hall, in upper Bell Canyon, Ventura County, California. Most of the photographs are courtesy of Marcia Silvernale McGillis, of Cloverdale, California. Other photographs were provided by Ed Hall (Bill Hall's son), who now lives in Montana (Knight and Vincent 2016). All of the photographs seen here, as well as additional family pictures, are available to researchers at the Chatsworth Historic Society. A small amount of information on other historical stock ranches in the Simi Hills is included in this paper. The locations of the Silvernale (circled in blue) and Hall houses (circled in red) can be seen in Figure 2.

Before proceeding however, it is necessary to note that the former ranch is the location of several significant sites. These include a large prehistoric Chumash ceremonial site complex, three extant (at this writing) National Register-eligible rocket-engine testing gantry's and associated support facilities, and the site of a former, now historic, experimental nuclear reactor. For the purposes of this report, the general setting of all of these sites will be described as "Sky Valley," based partially on the name of the historic ranch, but more-so because the term captures the "feel" of the Eastern Simi Hills uplands well. A few comments on the Burro Flats Painted Cave site, the motion-picture filming, and the now-historic Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL), follow the body of the report. A good overview of the history of the area can be found in Bryne (2012). An excellent illustrated presentation on the history of the Sky Valley/Santa Susana Field laboratory can be found at Chatsworthhistory.com; Select Presentations, and then select Burro Flats Rocketdyne SSFL History.

Although all of the former Sky Valley Ranch has now been examined for the presence of archaeological sites, only a few historic sites have been recorded, and the general history of the ranch has been described only in outline (Corbett et al. 2012, 2015; Corbett and Guttenberg 2014). The main purpose of this report is to attempt to insure that regionally important historical information, which has been provided by Marcia Silvernale McGillis, Sally Silvernale Ziegler, Edwin Hall, and Orrin Sage, is recorded, preserved, and made available to those who are interested in the history of the eastern Simi Hills/west San Fernando Valley region.

The Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch was located in the eastern Simi Hills, which form part of the western Transverse Ranges, one of California's geomorphic provinces. Most of the Simi Hills are in Ventura County, while the eastern-most end of the hills is in Los Angeles County (Note that the Spanish called what is now known as the Simi Hills, the *Sierra de Santa Susana*). The eastern Simi Hills uplands are located at the eastern edge of Ventura County, and consist of a diverse terrain of hills, ridges, flats (or *portreros*), small canyons, and numerous scenic rock outcrops. Two of the most interesting geological features in the Sky Valley Ranch area are Burro Flats, and the north-south oriented Burro Flats Fault. The Burro Flats Fault has created upper Bell Canyon, into which all of the run-off from Burro Flats and a few other small near-by canyons flow; the run-off from these several sources join together and flow south a mile and turn east, thus forming the western-most headwaters of the Los Angeles River. The geology of the ranch and surrounding area is described in Sage (1971), Squires (1997:294-296), and Corbett et al. (2015:7-9, 50).

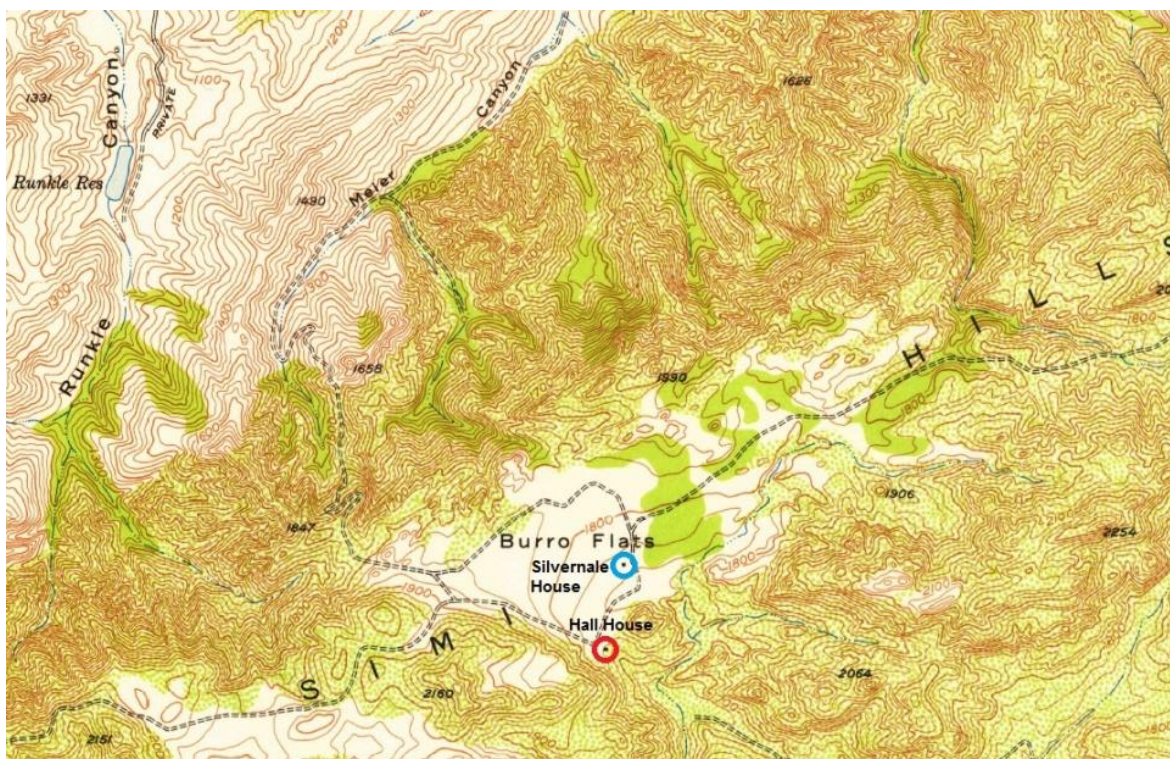


Figure 2

Plant communities on and near-by the ranch 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. The Sky Valley Ranch area is critical habitat and forms an important part of the 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 lions, and bobcats are still seen, and a black bear was photographed- a rare event- in late 2016. The natural history of the eastern Simi Hills is discussed in King (2011), King and Parsons (2000).

The Silvernale/Hall Sky Valley Ranch was part of what had been the 113,009-acre *Rancho Simi San Jose Nuestra Senora de Altagarcia y Simi* (or, more simply, *Rancho Simi*) "land-grant," which was given to Santiago Pico (some sources say that it was to his three sons: Francisco Javier Pico, Patricio Pico, and Miguel Pico), by the Spanish Governor of California, Diego de Borica, in 1795, in recognition for his services with the Spanish Army (note: the name "Simi" is derived from the Chumash village of *Simiiji*, which was located in the west end of Simi valley). Most Spanish "grants" were actually use-permits, and not out-right presentations of land (i.e., the crown allowed the grantees to *use* the land, but not to *own* it). In 1842, Mexican Governor Juan Alvarado confirmed the *Rancho Simi* grant (i.e., he confirmed actual ownership), and the ranch was then sold to Jose de la Guerra y Noriega, of Santa Barbara. In 1865, following the Mexican-American War, the United States confirmed Jose de la Guerra's ownership. In 1858, following Jose de la Guerra's death, his family

sold the ranch to the Philadelphia and California Petroleum Company, which explored for, but failed to find commercial quantities of oil, and soon after began to sell off portions of the ranch.

In 1887, much of the old grant was purchased by the Simi Land and Water Company, which proceeded to sub-divide the ranch. The place-name "Burro Flats" can be seen in their Tract A, on an 1888 map, which the company produced for advertisement purposes. "Potrero del Burro" can be translated as "Pasture of the Burro," or as we know it, "Burro Flats." Farms and stock ranches soon began to be developed in Simi Valley itself, while the Simi Hills uplands continued to be used mostly to run range-cattle, and some sheep. In 1910 Eddie Maier, a millionaire beer brewer, purchased Tract A and began to develop his own ranch operations. In 1939 the higher (southern) parts of the ranch were sold to Henry Silvernale and Bill Hall.

2 Sky Valley Ranch History

Henry W. Silvernale (1882-1972) established Sky Valley Ranch at Burro Flats in 1939. Burro Flats itself, and a smaller flat to the immediate southwest ("Little Burro Flats" or "Sudan Flats") could be dry farmed, while much of the rest of the ranch was suitable for range cattle. Henry's sons Max and Rex had a friend named William H. (Bill) Hall (1913-2002), who was about their age (Figures 3 and 4). Henry, Max and Bill agreed to be partners and they bought 1,060 acres for \$3.00 an acre; Henry, Max and Bill each had 1/3 share.. Sally Silvernale Ziegler reported that "they didn't call him Bill, they always called him 'Bee' or 'Beehler.' Bill passed away in his early 80s . . . He had one son [Edwin] who became a college professor in Montana." According to Marcia Silvernale McGillis, Bill's wife Betty ". . . was a child's book author, whose pen-name was "Bettye" (Figure 5).

Betty's father was Frank John Knapp Sr. (1875-1952) and her mother was Mary Jane Meixner Knapp (1878-1949). The Knapp family had moved to the then-new Owensmouth community, in what is now part of Canoga Park, in 1911. Betty's father Frank, and her brother Max, knew quite a bit about local history and they had met many members of the old west San Fernando Valley Native American/mixed race community. Max Knapp told Bob Edberg (Edberg 1977) that ". . . Bell Canyon was more or less the Headquarters for the Spanish and Mexicans in this part of the Valley . . . This is what Max had heard from the oldtime Mexicans and halfbreeds living at the Leonis Adobe and elsewhere in the Calabasas area . . . Max's sister and her husband lived at Burro Flats . . . [During the 1920's] Max talked with a boy named 'Chief' and other oldtimers at the Leonis Adobe in Calabasas. It was from them that he got all of the information . . . Max says that when the Spanish and Mexicans came to the Valley (early to mid-1800's), the Indians caught smallpox, and therefore they scattered in all directions, leaving the Chatsworth Reservoir area." The person that Max Knapp called "Chief" may be the same person that Ed Hall remembered as "the Cowboy."



Rec: Dad, Harry, Rex + Marcia

Figure 3



*Mom, Dad, Johnny, Marcia
1928*

Figure 4

The Silvernale ranch house was established on the east side of Burro Flats (Figure 6), while the Hall ranch house was established a short distance away, near the head of Bell Canyon. The site of the Hall Ranch House is recorded as CA-VEN-1303H/56-001303 (Knight and Vincent 2016), while the site of the Silvernale Ranch House, which no longer exists, is unrecorded.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Access to the ranch was difficult at first. The first motor vehicle road from the San Fernando Valley, to the Burro Flats area, was the *Dayton Canyon Motorway* (Knight 2016a; hereafter the DCM), which was a simple one lane dirt road that was used by local-traffic, including trucks, jeeps, and a few cars, including the two Cadillac's seen in Figure 18, and perhaps the wagon train seen in Figure 22. This route was developed around the time of World War I. From the San Fernando Valley, at today's Valley Circle Blvd. and Roscoe Blvd., the DCM went west, up Dayton Canyon, and then turned northwest and ascended the north fork of the canyon, to just below (south of) what is now upper Woolsey Canyon Road. After paralleling each other for about 1/2 mile, the old and new routes merge, turn north, and from that point generally follow the same route all the way to the top of the grade, where the DCM T-boned (and Woolsey Canyon now T-bones) with the old *Albertson Motorway*, at *Black Canyon Road*, on *Sage Ranch*. Largely overgrown with chaparral today, what is left of the old DCM route is quite narrow and in some places is washed out, but still passable on foot. The State of California Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority has recently acquired much of the lower (eastern) part of the old DCM, and the MRCA intends to maintain the area as parkland/open space, and to develop the old DCM into an equestrian and pedestrian route.

The Albertson Motorway was another simple one-lane dirt road; it was the first east-west motor vehicle route to cross the Simi Hills uplands. Much of this road, which is not open to the public, still runs between Sage Ranch Park and Thousand Oaks. According to Orrin Sage "I think that the Silvernales would have used the DCM to the top of the hill and then continued 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 . . . 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 [just west of the southwest corner of Sage Ranch] by the construction of the LOX [Liquid Oxygen] Plant and all traffic then used the [new] paved North American Aviation 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" (see Knight 2016c).

The Albertson Motorway route later became known as the Albertson Fire Road. Modern paved roads that were developed during construction of the SSFL eventually replaced the Albertson for general use, and in some places obliterated it, but, some areas are still extant in both the old Sky Valley Ranch and at the former Sage Ranch. The early road alignments can be seen on an undated late-1940s Automobile Club of Southern California map for *Los Angeles and Vicinity*. Ed Hall told Ray Vincent that Ed's mother [Betty] complained about having to open and close numerous gates along the way. A portion of the Albertson can be seen in Figure 2 (crossing from the bottom left of the map, to the center right of the map).

The ranch was a success during its short life. The cattle operations did well; cattle would continue to be run at the old ranch, by the Sage family, even after the Silvernale's and Hall's left and the field lab was developed; the last cattle, which were used to help keep the brush down, were removed during the mid-1980s (Knight 2016a:24). Figures 7 and 8 show a mature Henry Silvernale and a young Bill Hall at work on the ranch, with some of their cattle in the background. Given how young Bill looks in these two photos, they were likely taken sometime in the early 1940s. Everyone on the ranch tried to be as self-sufficient as possible: Marcia Silvernale McGillis reported that "We had several hundred head of Hereford cattle and horses. My grandfather raised pigs, chickens and

had a large vegetable garden . . . They did a lot of deer hunting up there" (personal communication 2016). There was also some occasional income due to the filming activities on the ranch (see below).



Figure 7



Figure 8

Although Bill Hall (Figure 9, with son Edwin, ca. 1950) did not want to sell, Henry (Figure 10, with the pet bobcat, Bobbie) owned the controlling interest, and he decided to accept the offer; Marcia also recalled that North American Aviation pressured them a bit too. But she also acknowledged that life on the ranch, for the times, was primitive, and it is likely that Henry realized that it was time to move on: "Henry lived there until he was 71 years old, when they decided it would be a good idea to have a telephone and electricity. They cooked with propane and we carried kerosene lamps from room to room and set them in holders on the wall." They used well water and whatever run-off they could catch, as well as whatever drinkables they brought up the DCM.

Sky Valley Ranch did not exist for a long time, only 15 years (1939-1954). But it was doing well when it was sold. Burro Flats and Sudan Flats had proven to be good places to farm, as seen in an air-photo that shows many windrows of cut grain in Burro Flats, waiting to be harvested (Figure 11; Silvernale house circled in blue, Hall house circled in red). It was, however, a long drive to the market, and there were very few immediate neighbors. If someone got seriously injured, they might die before help could arrive, or before the injured person could be taken to a hospital. And on a good day- and given the natural beauty of the place, there must have been many- it was paradise; the stars must have been magnificent almost every night. Henry had picked the name "Sky Valley Ranch" well.

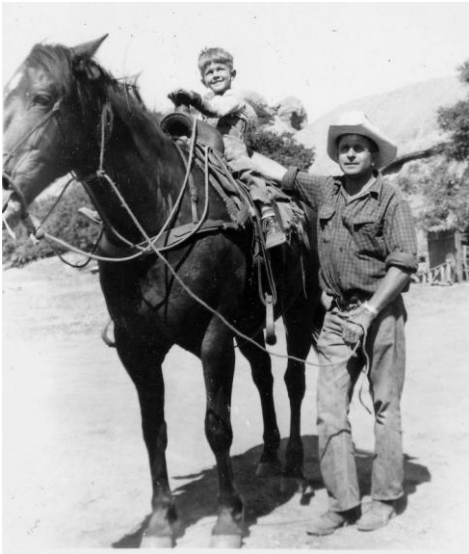


Figure 9



Figure 10

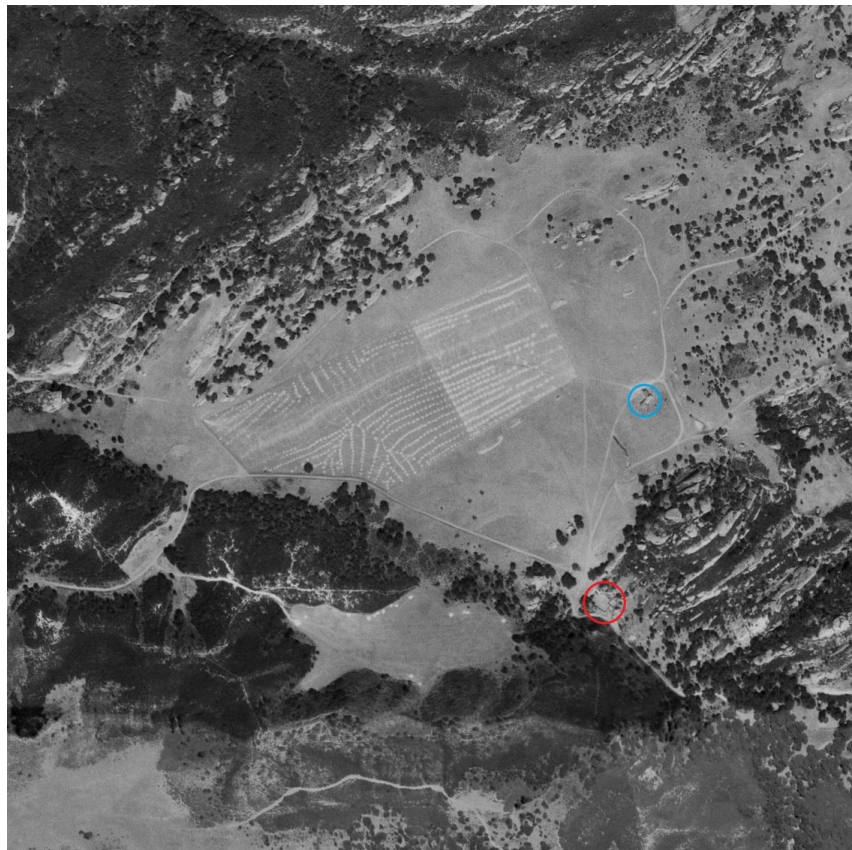


Figure 11

A letter from Marcia Silvernale McGillis to the author, dated September 9, 2015, talks about life at Sky Valley Ranch, the beginnings of the ranch, the operations, and how it all came to an end. Lightly edited, the letter reads as follows:

I am enclosing pictures to illustrate some of the life on the ranch. My cousin Sally was just here for a visit and we had a good time telling stories about our childhood on the ranch—baling hay, riding horseback, doing chores, and swimming in the pool my grandfather [Henry] had built on White Oak Flat which was on the eastern part of the ranch where Rocketdyne was [Bill and Ed Hall can be seen in this pool in Figure 12].



Figure 12

To give you a short background- my grandfather, Henry Silvernale, and my grandmother Beulah, came to Santa Monica from Wisconsin in the 1920s. He was a dentist in Santa Monica. They had 2 sons: Rex and Max. Rex was my dad and Sally's dad, Max, was a Zoology professor at Santa Monica City College.

My grandfather and the boys did a lot of hunting and fishing in the mountains around them. "Dad" taught the boys to take care of all kinds of animals to keep them busy and out of trouble. They had a neighbor boy named Bill Hall who used to watch them with the quail and rabbits and chickens. He had never hunted or fished or been up in the mountains, so my grandfather kind of took him in and he started doing everything with the boys. He became like another son. He loved everything about wilderness and wildlife.

The boys had been deer hunting in Box Canyon and told dad about how beautiful it was up there and he went with them and fell in love with the whole area. He had always wanted to raise cattle so he talked to his realtor, who found out the land belonged to the Maier Brewing Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He made them an offer of \$3 an acre and bought 1,060 acres and began his dream. Bill Hall, or Bee as we called him, became a part

owner. My grandfather retired at 65, they moved up to the ranch and Bee helped build the house and then built his own house into the sandstone caves above what became the barn and corral below. The entire back/side was sandstone rock [See Knight and Vincent 2016].

My grandfather contracted with RKO Pictures and Republic Pictures to make western movies on the ranch- my cousin and I got to work as horse wranglers on some of the movies.

My grandfather began buying cattle at auctions. He bought a prizewinning bull and began breeding and building his herd. They had a large cattle truck and brought them in one truckload at a time. He also purchased several horses from auctions for us to ride and to use for running the cattle. He would take cattle as they were ready, to market at the auctions again and buy more. He eventually had several hundred head. My horse was purchased from an auction- he was a Tennessee Walking horse that had been in the circus- I used to ride him in parades.

To answer your question about the Indian bedrock mortars. We used to take my grandmother's spices like cloves etc. and grind them with berries and leaves for pretend play. There was at least one pestle which we used- I don't know where it came from. The stools we sat on around the table were made from nail kegs covered with cowhide for seats and each keg was branded with the Burro Flats brand . . .

When my grandfather was 71 yrs. old, North American Aviation bought the ranch. He decided it would be a good idea to have a telephone! Bee was not happy about leaving, but he bought a ranch in Malibu Canyon, later selling that and buying a bigger ranch in Montana . . . Those years were the best years for all of us.

Note that there are no "White Oaks" (*Quercus lobata*) at the old pond location today, although the entire area is surrounded by a mature healthy California (or Coast) Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) woodland, and that Ed Hall continues to own property in the Santa Monica Mountains to this day, although he does own a ranch and live in Montana.

On October 19, 2015, Marcia told the author that: "I don't know where the name Burro Flats came from . . . My grandfather [Henry] called the ranch "Sky Valley Ranch" and the flat area was known as Burro Flats." Marcia later provided an example of the Sky Valley Ranch name as seen on their ranch stationary (Figure 13). The ranch was (and is) also widely known as the "Burro Flats" and occasionally as the Silvernale Ranch or "Silvernales Ranch," as seen on a ranch fence sign (Figure 14).

Sky Valley Ranch
 POST OFFICE BOX 192
 CANOGA PARK, CALIFORNIA

Figure 13



Figure 14

Additional family recollections were provided by Sally Silvernale Ziegler, to Ann Vincent of the Chatsworth Historical Society, on August 13, 2015, as follows:

There were 4 of us- myself & my brother Lee and Marcia and Susan. Susan ended up going to Denmark almost right out of high school and never returned. She married and had a family over there. My brother Lee didn't do much riding- he was the young one of the group. I have a very good picture of my grandfather & grandmother plus Rex and Max. Marcia's father [Rex] was a couple of years older than my father [Max]. I also have a very cute picture of the ranch jeep that ended up being "my" car for high school at Canoga Park High. I was not very fond of the jeep but of course the boys loved it . . . Sudan Flat above the main hay field. It was on the hill and only this special grass [sorghum] was planted up there. My father plowed it with a team of work horses. They had all of the proper tack with the harness & plow. My father was a teacher so we spent all of our summers there; Rex was unable to spend that kind of time at the ranch.

Another exciting event in the last few years was the addition of an orphaned female bobcat. We named her Bobby. She was adorable. I do have a picture of her [Figure 10]. Grandma Mom would set up the dining table for all of the movie people and Bobby would hop up and clean off the table. She was a real character. We would also on occasion take a family ride [on horses] down to Simi Valley. We would have lunch down in the valley. I rode my grandmother's horse Alviso. Almost all of Grandpa's horses came from the LA Horse & Mule Auction.

There was also a barn on the Sky Valley Ranch, but we know very little about it; the only information available is a note from Marcia that asks, ". . . I am wondering if the very old, very large barn that was on the Box Canyon side, was there and built by the previous owners? It was built up against the large outcrop of rocks that were around Bill Hall's house. A very scary place with huge hay loft and lots of barn cats. The corral was built around it" (personal communication October 19, 2015). Unfortunately, none of the photographs that were provided shows a barn.

We know that a member of the Agoure (or Agoura) family, named Walter Brinkop, visited Burro Flats in 1914; he may have camped out under the stars, but it is not impossible that by that time there was some sort of simple structure at Burro Flats, where one could spend the night. The brief note that he left does not say one way or the other (Knight 2016d). Marcia Silvernale McGillis

noted that in some family photographs of the Silvernale ranch house, the house looks different, older, and more weathered (Figures 15 and 16), than the one she remembers from her childhood (Figures 17 and 18). She said that it possible that an early version of the house was already there when her grandfather bought the ranch, and that it was probably subsequently improved, and became what she remembers from her childhood. If this is the case, then the Silvernale's and Hall's were not the first people to establish a "modern" house in the eastern Simi Hills. In any event, they are the first people there is currently any historic record for.



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

The interior of the Silvernale house can be seen in Figures 19 and 20. In Figure 19 the view is across the main room, towards the window in the east end of the house (also seen in Figures 16 and 17). In Figure 20 the view is towards the west end of the house. There is a framed painting above the fireplace, and about this one can see a hand-painted beam/panel, going across the top of the room. The painting shows a vine of some kind. Figure 21 shows a segment of this painted panel. This panel was saved by a Rocketdyne employee named Pat Montoya, before the house was

demolished. Pat and his son, also named Pat, and who also worked on "the Hill," saved the panel, and Pat (the second) gave the panel to the author, who in turn gave it to the Chatsworth Historical Society, where it can be seen today. It is one of the last, as far as we know, fragment of the old Silvernale ranch house.



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21

The following additional comments are edited excerpts from an interview with Sally Silvernale Ziegler, by Clark Stevens (2015). Clark interviewed Sally at her home in Santa Barbara.

Well, I'll just give you a little background, my grandfather [Henry William Silvernale] was a dentist in Santa Monica, a very prominent dentist. He and my grandmother had a very nice place there . . . And they were very active in town as far as their social life and all of that. And then he always wanted a ranch. So he bought . . . I think it was 2300 acres. My dad [Max Silvernale] was a school teacher, a professor at Santa Monica College, and my mom [Helen Thompson Silvernale] was very busy and she worked at the college part time. So my Dad had the summers off. So my dad and mom, took us when we were very young, and we started when we could barely walk . . . out there at the ranch, at Burro Flats.

. . . My father [Max] didn't want to sell. There was a public domain issue. So anyway, after [they sold] we went up to the Sierras and bought 250 acres up there on the eastern side, just south of Lone Pine in Olancho, so that was mine. So my folks retired there, and there wasn't anything my dad didn't do. He was an incredibly talented guy. And he had his masters falconer's license, so he trapped hawks on his place and hunted with his hawks.

He had this fabulous falcon that he trapped on his place. But we had a coopers hawk from there too. And he hunted with all of them . . . We had every kind of bird dog . . . I gave my dad one for Christmas one year, because everyone he had, had been terrible, none of 'em did what he wanted them to, because he was super strict about what they did, But then I got him a Samoyed, she was about six months old, gave it to him for Christmas, and he'd only had hunting dogs. And he says 'god damn it, what am I gonna do with this xxxing dog,' and I said, well, just see if you like her, because they're very trainable . . . And so, in the end, she was taking the hawks hunting, and the hawks would sit on her back, and she would spook out the rabbits and everything. And the hawks would take off, he would do one hawk at a time, on her back! Yes, she would go flush them, and he said, 'I do not believe this, what a fabulous dog!' And the cooper's hawk was good, and the bigger hawk that he had was also good. Later on he carved a coopers hawk, I have it at home, and he carved my hawk out of bristlecone that he collected on the mountain.

Grandpa (Henry) . . . his big thing up there was doing things that he wanted to do. OK, now the big thing that he did were movies. There were a lot of movies that we did up there, and my cousin and I worked for the movies for two years. Yeah, and he had a great time. He bought a jeep, and he did all the plowing with his team of horses. He had a small meadow near the top of the hill, that he called Sudan Flat . . . there was a big pasture up there, where he grew Sudan [sorghum] grass for the animals" [Sally's referring to the small portrero just southwest of Burro Flats]. Then he had five acres in the center of Burro Flats . . . the house was on the flats too, but he had five acres in oats there, and he did the oats, some with the horses, mostly the horses did it, and they were just a great team, just super, but he'd get them all harnessed up . . . there was no tractor, they had a hay fork, which he used with the jeep, and I ended up getting the jeep.

The house was interesting, it was a long, maybe 2,000 sq ft, but long . . . It was facing Corregidor rock, and then there was a bunkhouse for kids and whatever . . . the house was built for ranch type things, and they had movies for lunch and they had a lot of the movie people and then you know the family. And Christmas we always had big huge things. My dad [Max] had one brother [Rex], so it was just the two of them, and he [Rex] had two girls [Susanne and Marcia] and my dad had my brother [Lee] and I [Sally]. So there were just the

four of us . . . The only thing we used to do is ride, we'd ride down from the flat area we'd ride down to Simi Valley and have our lunch and then come back . . . we used to go out and collect roots for the fireplace . . .

My father's older brother was Rex; he and my dad (Max) both graduated from UCLA, and uncle Rex, he was an SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity] international president, very unlike my father . . . he loved the social life. My dad, they made him join a fraternity, that's where he met my mom, at a dance, or something, but that was the only [social] thing he ever did. He was an outcast with that stuff, he was a nature boy, and he hunted probably from the time he was 10 years old. He used to make his own bows and arrows and hunt with them. My grandmother [Beulah Silvernale] had three sisters (Alice, Thayer and Bernice), and she was very talented, she played five different instruments, and she was an excellent musician. And she was a graduate of the business college in Wisconsin, a very talented woman."

During the Clark Steven's interview with Sally Silvernale Ziegler [2 10:44], Clark asked: "Do you remember any or your Grandfather talk about any Chumash people coming up onto the ranch?" To which Sally answered, "No, but we have I have a lot of the artifacts." On another occasion Marcia Silvernale McGillis told the author that, "I remember collecting some of the arrowheads in the area but do not know who might have larger items. Looking north from the house, there was a low sandstone rock where we used to grind spices using the mortar and pestle that were carved out of the rock." Certainly, all of the family members were well-aware of the numerous Native American sites on the ranch, especially Burro Flats Painted Cave.

3. Burro Flats Painted Cave

The most important archaeological site in the Sky Valley area is the 25-acre National Register of Historic Places-listed Burro Flats Painted Cave (CA-VEN-1072 / 56-001072; hereafter BFPC). According to NASA, "The pictographs at Burro Flats are a remarkable record of prehistoric Native American art. Archaeologists who have visited the site have said that it includes some of the most dramatic and best preserved pictographs known and is among the finest examples of prehistoric pictographic art in North America. The site's 1976 inclusion on the NRHP (#76000539) reflects its significance . . . the main gallery is renowned for its aesthetic mastery, vibrant colors, and good state of preservation . . ."

The site was visited, and the first known sketches of a small selection of the pictographs were made, and provided to the Southwest Indian Museum, in 1914, by Walter Brinkop. The first professional researcher to be made aware of the site was apparently the anthropologist John Peabody Harrington. During the period 1914-1917, the young John Peabody Harrington visited the west San Fernando Valley, and in 1916 he recorded information from a Native American consultant named Setimo Moraga Lopez. The two visited an Anglo-American settler named Charlie Bell, at *Rancho El Escorpion*, where the three men discussed local history. Bell described what he call *Los Escorpiones Canyon* (soon known as Bell Canyon) to Harrington: "One mile or maybe a mile and a half up this Escorpiones Canyon above Bell's house is a flat with a grove of encinos on it—where Indian rancheria used to be . . . Farther up is a place where the creek runs over flat rocks . . . The flat rock where the water runs over is full of mortar pits . . . Some are large and some are small . . ." These comments definitely sound like Bell was describing the BFPC site (Harrington 1986, 106-117:3:1 to 106-117:5:7).

In 1917 another consultant, Juan Menendez, provided Harrington with specific comments that explain the origin of the geographical name "Burro Flats." It is important to understand that Juan's maternal grandfather was Odón Chihuya, who had been the principal grantee of the Mexican Period *Rancho El Escorpion* land grant- which was none other than the old *Huwam* village site, at the mouth of the canyon! At the time of the Grant, Odón was one of the most important members of the west San Fernando Valley Native American community, and *Rancho El Escorpion* became, and for many years was, the focus of Native American activity in the west valley (Johnson 1997:269; Knight 2016c). Menendez told Harrington that "After the world was created, before the ground dried out, El Senor, our Savior, and a (special sacred) burro visited, and they left their tracks . . ." This is a truly remarkable statement indeed!

The first archaeological excavations at the Burro Flats site were performed by the Archaeological Survey Association of Southern California (ASASC) in 1953 and 1954. Charles Rozaire, who performed new excavations at the site in 1959-1960, was the first person to note that the Burro Flats main panel was most like "those in the west-central coast ranges of Santa Barbara, Kern, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties" (Rozaire 1959:4); in other words, they were Chumash in style. Chumash rock art expert Campbell Grant visited the site in the mid-1960s, and he recorded the main panel as his Ventura-4. Like Rozaire, Grant classified the pictographs as being Chumash in style (Grant 1965:74-76, Plates 25 and 30).

On June 23, 1979, just after the summer solstice, a small group of researchers visited at the urging of John Romani, then a graduate student at California State University Northridge. These researchers included John and Gwen Romani, Danny Larson, Bob Edberg, Arlene Benson, and Edwin Krupp, all of which subsequently wrote papers on the Burro Flats site (Benson 1980:16-19; Edberg 1985:65-92; Krupp 1982:38-43, 1983:129-132; Romani 1981; Romani et al. 1985:93-108; 1988; Knight 2012; 2017).

We know, from the information collected by Bob Edberg, that Frank Knapp, Betty Knapp Hall's father (i.e. Bill Hall's wife), knew many of the members of the old Native American/mixed race, west San Fernando Valley community (Knight and Vincent 2016). Although we have no definitive information, it is probable that the Silvernale and Hall families were knowledgeable about the connection between Burro Flats Painted Cave and the native community, and it is probably safe to assume that members of that community continued to visit the Burro Flats area, at least as long as Sky Valley Ranch continued to operate. It is also possible, although completely speculative, that "Sky Valley" is a translation of the Native American name for the area.

4. Movies

Over 40 movies and numerous TV programs, or portions thereof, were filmed in and around Burro Flats and elsewhere on Sky Valley Ranch, between the late 1930s and the early 1950s, before North American Aviation acquired the area in 1954. (Magers 2003:101-102). Magers notes that "Most of the old cowboys called it 'Jackass Flats'" (2003:101). None of the movies are well-remembered today (*Sergeant York*, starring Gary Cooper, was probably the best known, at least at the time that it was produced). Titles include: *Wings of the Hawk*, *Come On, Cowboys*, *Zorro's Fighting Legion*, *Code of the Cactus*, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds*, *Adventures of Red Ryder*, *Robin Hood of the Pecos*, and *California* (see photo of a wagon trail crossing Burro Flats, from this 1947 movie, in Figure 22). Sally Silvernale Ziegler noted that ". . . one of the most remembered movies that was filmed at 'Sky Valley Ranch' . . . it was *Rose of Cimarron*, with Mala Powers, Bill Williams & Jack Beutel as the main stars. Other actors were Jim Davis, Bob Steele directed by Edward Alperson 20th

Century Fox. 1952. This is the one that Marcia and I worked on all summer on with movie horses. Great summer for us. You can check it out on the web. Some good reviews & plot stories . . ." (personal communication, 3/13/2017).

Of the TV series filmed at Burro Flats, the best known are probably *Zorro* and *The Lone Ranger*; Henry Silvernale's horse *Silver* (Figure 1) was named for the Lone Ranger's horse Silver (as in, "Hi-ho Silver, Away!"). Marcia Silvernale McGillis reports that Figure 1 shows ". . . my grandfather on his horse, *Silver*, who was named for the Lone Ranger's horse" (personal communication, March 3, 2016).

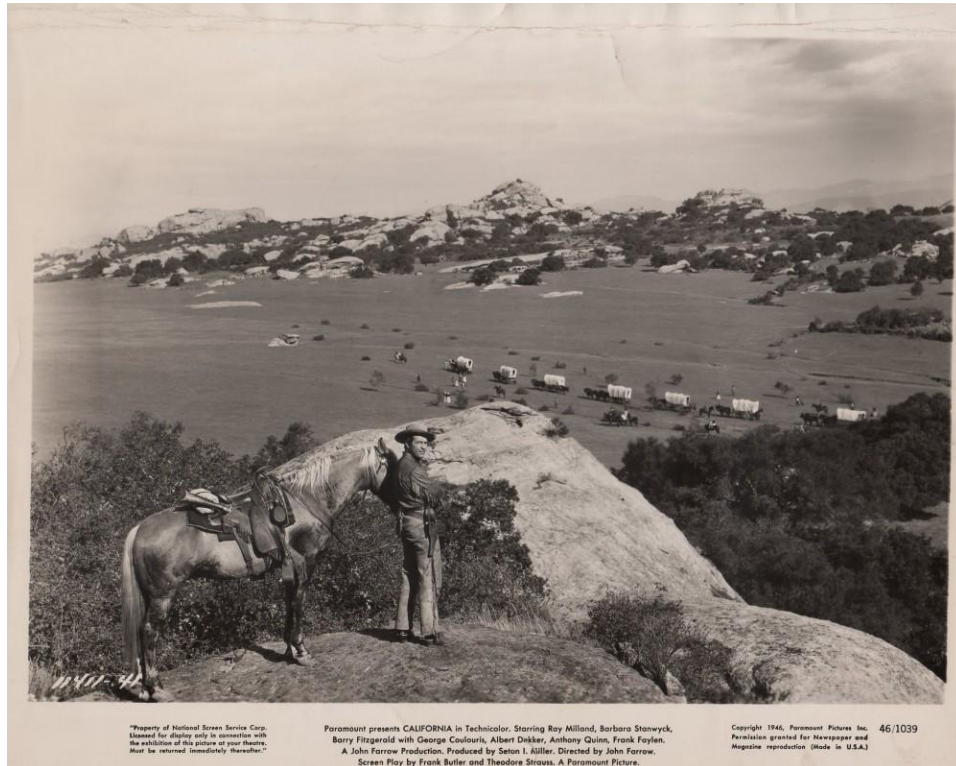


Figure 22

Much more on the filming of movies and etc. at Burro Flats can be found on-line at <http://a-drifting-cowboy.blogspot.com/2012/07/chatsworth-filming-location-burro-flats.html>. and at [http://www.imdb.com/search/title/locations=Burro%20Flats,%20Simi%20Hills,%20California,%20USA&sort=year,asc&ref=ttloc loc 2](http://www.imdb.com/search/title/locations=Burro%20Flats,%20Simi%20Hills,%20California,%20USA&sort=year,asc&ref=ttloc%20loc%202).

5. Santa Susana Field Laboratory

In 1947 a large and important airplane manufacturing company- North American Aviation- leased, and later bought, 540 acres to the immediate east of Sky Valley Ranch from the Dundas family; these acres had been previously leased by the Sage Ranch, and they became the bulk of what was later known as Area I (Knight and Vincent 2016). North American Aviation was the largest producer of airplanes in the United States during the World War II era. The war had ended, but the Cold War was beginning, and NAA decided to begin testing and developing different types of rockets- the wave of the future. The first test-stand at Santa Susana was completed in 1949, and the first live-fire test took place in 1950.

By 1954 the Santa Susana operation had become known as the "Rocketdyne and Power Division of North American Aviation," and in that year the company purchased Sky Valley Ranch from the Silvernale's and Hall's, and one month later purchased the previously leased Dundas parcel (known as Area I). Sky Valley Ranch was subsequently divided into what became known as Areas II, III, and IV, with the eastern-most 2,000 feet of the ranch becoming part of Area I. Area II eventually became the focal point for *rocket-engine* testing (note: no rocket of any kind was ever launched from the field lab), and between 1954 and 1957 the Alfa, Bravo, Coca, and Delta test-stand complexes were built and operated, first by the United States Air Force (1959-1973), and later by NASA (from 1973). Many of those that worked there and/or were involved with NAA/Rocketdyne called the facilities "The Hill," or "Rocketdyne." All of the engines of every American rocket used- from the post-WW2 Redstone short-range rocket, to the huge Saturn-rockets that took Man to the Moon, as well as the engines for the United States Space Shuttle, were tested at what had been Sky Valley Ranch. See Bryne (2012), Hayes (1997), Murphy (1979), and McCarthy (1997). An on-line records search for "Santa Susana Field Laboratory" and "Rocketdyne" will provide numerous links on the subject.

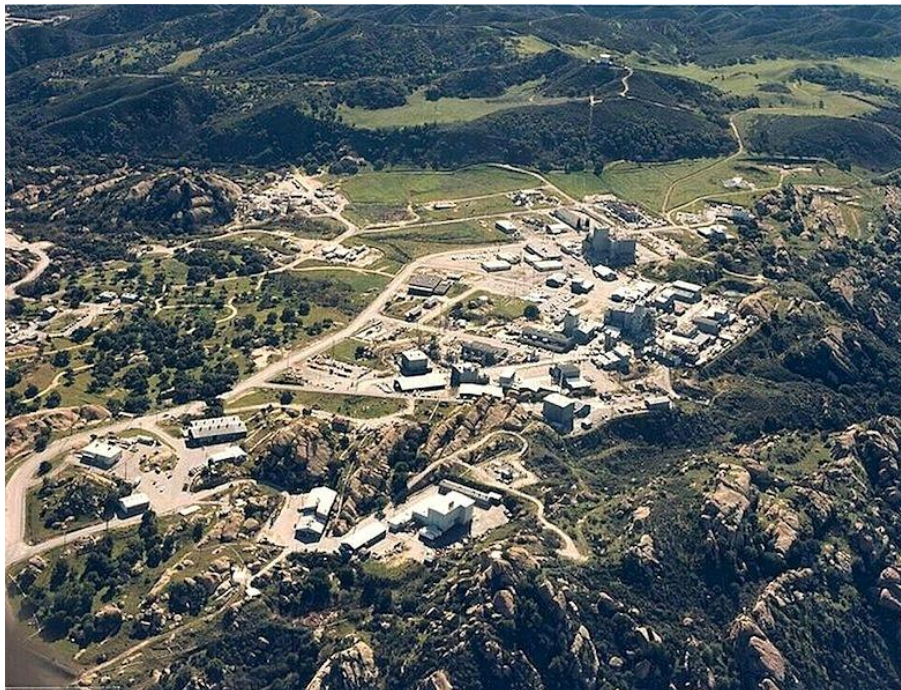


Figure 23

Today the facility is inactive and correctly referred to as "the former SSFL." The name "North American Aviation" is now known only by historians, while many "old-timers" continue to call the place "Rocketdyne." The majority of the old buildings and facilities have been demolished and removed from the mountain, although it has been proposed that the Alpha, Bravo, and Coca gantries and a selection from the associated support facilities be retained for exhibit and historic interpretation. It is currently envisioned that ALL of the former SSFL, including all of the Areas (II, III, and IV) that were once part of the Sky Valley Ranch, will eventually be transferred to a land-managing agency, possibly the National Park Service, and that the entire Sky Valley uplands will become public park land and/or open space.

Conclusion

It is most important to understand that the juxtaposition of a large Chumash village site, the ceremonial center of which included an astronomically-significant "main panel" of elaborate and beautiful polychrome paintings, where winter solstice observances took place, and a complex set of BRMs and cupules, where summer solstice observances took place, with the massive, near-adjacent, Coca rocket-test stands and associated facilities, is unique in the world. According to Dr. E.C. Krupp, Director Los Angeles Griffith Observatory, "The paintings, which record the involvement of the Chumash with the sky, are separated by just a ridge from the stands on which the huge moon-rocket and Space Shuttle engines were test fired. The Coca test stands and the Burro Flats painted shelter . . . comprise the only place on earth where our modern world heritage in space converges with the prehistoric reach for the sky. The cosmographic and astronomical pairing of these two cultural resources in this way transforms the landscape into a remarkable and unique expression of the human bond with the celestial realm, from prehistoric California to the Space Age. For that reason, the place is irreplaceably significant in the history of space exploration, in the history of NASA, in the history of California, in American history, and in the history of the world. The co-location of Burro Flats and the Coca test stand is exceptional and found nowhere else on earth. There will never be another first time to the moon, and the Coca test stand/Burro Flats pairing will never be duplicated" (Krupp 2014).

Thus although Sky Valley Ranch *per se* existed only for a moment in time, it represents the brief but important "period" between prehistoric Native Americans, and the dawn of the Space Age, and it is therefore also a part of the story of one of the most significant places in the world,

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