

# Chatsworth Stagecoach Trail

**The Old Santa Susana Stage Road**  
was designated Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument  
#92 in 1972, and was added to the U.S. National  
Register of Historic Places in 1974.

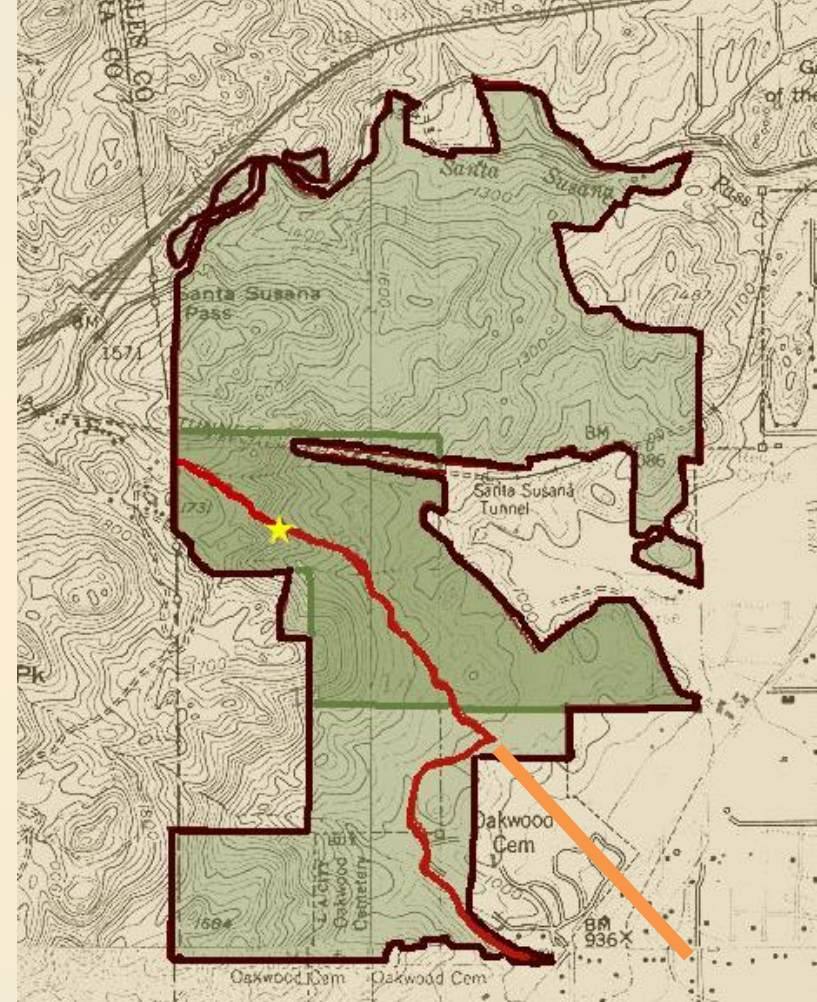
located in  
the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park in  
Chatsworth, California

A photograph of a rocky trail in a desert landscape. The trail is a narrow path of light-colored rocks and dirt, winding through a rocky hillside. Sparse, dry vegetation, including small shrubs and bare trees, is scattered across the scene. In the background, more rocky hills are visible under a clear blue sky. A white historical marker sign is mounted on a rock face on the left side of the trail.

OLD SANTA SUSANA  
STAGE ROAD  
DESIGNATED 1972  
NATIVE DAUGHTERS  
OF THE  
GOLDEN WEST  
ESTABLISHED 1972

# The Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park (SSPSHP)

- This 2009 Map of the 670 acre Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park shows the Andora Trail connecting to the Stagecoach Trail (in red) from the Andora entrance.
- The Stage Road originally cut through Oakwood cemetery to Lassen (in orange)
- The yellow star indicates the location of the 1939 Trail Marker at Devils Slide.





# History of the Santa Susana Pass

- The Santa Susana Pass was first used by the Native Americans as the main route between the San Fernando Valley and Simi Valley.
- During the Spanish Colonial Period, The original El Camino Real followed a coastal route from San Diego to San Francisco. The first mission was San Diego de Alcalá, founded in 1769.
- Upon completion of the 17th of 21 missions at San Fernando in 1797, an inland route through the Santa Susana Pass was established.



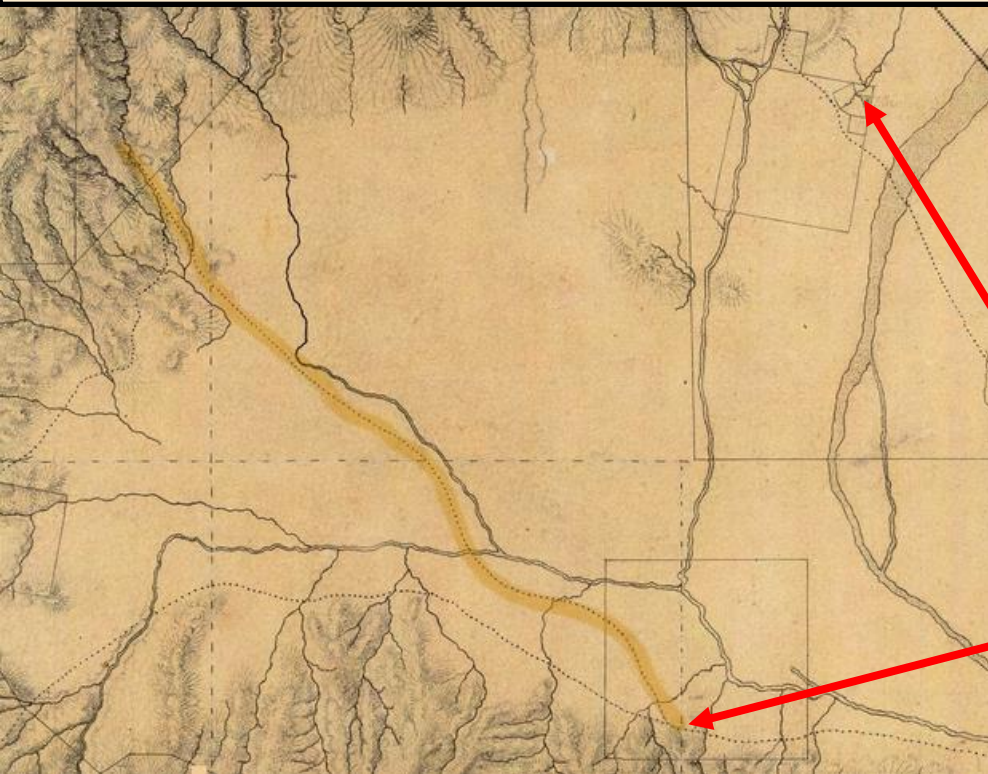
# History of the Santa Susana Pass

- The first recorded mention of the pass was in 1804. The Mission Father of San Buenaventura suggested to the Governor that the Santa Susana Pass would be a shorter route from Ventura to Mission San Fernando. That route included a stop at the Simi House.
- The red arrows identify the Simi House and the San Fernando Mission on an 1844 Exploration Map.
- San Fernando Mission Blvd. to Rinaldi takes you to Stoney Point and the Santa Susana Pass.





- In **1859**, the state provided \$15,000 to fix up the Santa Susana Pass Wagon Road, under the supervision of James P. Thompson.
- He was also awarded the contract to use the pass for carrying mail.



- **The Stagecoach Trail was in use for 34 years, from 1861 – 1895.**
- This map shows:
- The Stagecoach trail (highlighted in yellow)
- San Fernando Mission
- Los Encinos

# De la Ossa Stagecoach Swing Station

- Vicente and Rita De la Ossa are prominent citizens in Alta California, owning Rancho Providencia (Burbank) in 1839, then Rancho Los Encinos in 1849.
- In 1851, Manuela, their oldest daughter, marries James Thompson.
- In 1852, Thompson obtains a 5 year lease to half of Rancho La Brea. In 1857, Thompson captures the bandit Juan Flores in Santa Susana Pass. He serves as the LA County Sheriff in 1858-59.
- In 1858, Fabricio, son of the Vicente and Rita, owns land near the base of the Santa Susana Pass called *La Cuesta (the slope)*.
- In 1859, the state provided \$15,000 to fix up the Santa Susana Pass Wagon Road, under the supervision of James P. Thompson. He had also been awarded the contract to use the pass for carrying mail.



Jim and Manuela  
Thompson

# De la Ossa Stagecoach Swing Station

- In 1861, The first Overland stagecoach to use the pass made its run between San Francisco and Los Angeles on April 6. It was the Butterfield Stage line and the trip took 72 hours (3 days).
- 1861-1877, Fabricio runs the Stagecoach Swing Station at La Cuesta, and builds the De la Ossa adobe on the site. In 1868, the widowed Rita De la Ossa and her seven children under the age of 17 move into the adobe at La Cuesta with Fabricio.
- The 1876 completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP) tunnel through San Fernando ended the need to provide long-distance stagecoach service in California.
- In the 1880 census, Rita De la Ossa, 63, is living in Chatsworth with son Fabricio, 40, and four other children at the De la Ossa adobe. Her neighbor to the south was Francisco Miranda.
- William Bannon acquires the De la Ossa adobe in 1891.



Rita De la Ossa



View of the  
San Fernando  
Valley from  
the  
Stagecoach  
Trail





- The map to the right from California State Parks shows California Stage Lines in the 1850's and 60's. The Butterfield Overland Mail route is in red.
- The section below identifies an "Other Route" in gray, which was the Coast Stage Line from Los Angeles to Gilroy.



- The passenger fare for the 18-mile ride from Los Angeles to the Encino station was \$1.50.
- Besides serving as a place to change horses, the stage station at the Encino Ranch was a “Home Station.” This meant that it was owned and managed by the station manager and his family who offered meals and overnight accommodations for passengers, coach drivers, and other line employees.

From Gilroy To Los Angeles.			TOWNS May 18th, 1871.			See Page.	From Los Angeles To Gilroy.		
Fare.	Hours	Miles.					Miles.	Hours	Fare.
17.50	41	265	.....Santa Barbara.....	174	101	15			
18.00	44	280	..... Rincon.....		86				
18.00	47	293	.....San Buenaventura.....		73	11			
20.00	49	306	..... Santa Clara Valley.....		60				
20.00	51	320	..... Sime.....		46				
20.00	53	333	.....Mountain Station.....		33	5			
20.00	56	350	.....El Cino.....		16	2			
20.00	58	366	Arr.....Los Angeles.....Dep.	164	0	0			

**GILROY and LOS ANGELES.**  
COAST STAGE LINE.

W. G. ROBERTS, Agent, office 208 Montgomery street, San Francisco.  
General Agent, W. BUCKLEY, San Jose, California.  
Local Agents: Jos. KNOWLTON, Jr., Gilroy; WM. BALCH, San Juan; CHRIS. HAMEL, Natividad; L. C. BOETTCH, Plato Ranch; CHAS. KNOWLTON, Paso Robles Springs; J. C. ORTEGA, San Luis Obispo; ELI RUNDELL, Santa Barbara; J. WOOLFRSON, San Buenaventura; GEO. M. FALL, Los Angeles.  
Stage leaves Gilroy daily at 12 M. Stage leaves Los Angeles daily at 6 A. M.

From Gilroy To Los Angeles.			TOWNS May 18th, 1871.			See Page.	From Los Angeles To Gilroy.		
Fare.	Hours	Miles.					Miles.	Hours	Fare.
\$ 0.00	0	0	Dep..... Gilroy.....	Arr.	161	366	58		
1.50	2	12	..... San Juan.....			354			
2.50	4	24	..... Natividad.....			342			
4.00	6	38	..... Utiz Station.....			328			
5.50	8	52	..... Salinas River.....			314			
8.50	11	76	..... Last Chance.....			290			
10.00	13	92	..... San Antonio.....			274			
12.00	15	107	..... Plato Ranch.....			259			
14.00	17	121	..... Nacimiento.....			245			
15.00	19	136	..... Paso Robles Hot Springs.....			230			
16.00	22	150	..... San Margarita.....			215			
16.00	25	164	..... San Luis Obispo.....	174	202	86			
17.50	28	180	..... Arroyo Grande.....			185			
17.50	31	196	..... Zurry Station.....			170			
17.50	33	214	..... Foxens.....			152			
17.50	35	228	..... Ballard's.....			138			
17.50	37	243	..... San Marcus.....			123			
17.20	40	257	..... McCaffey's.....			109			
17.50	41	265	..... Santa Barbara.....	174	101	15			
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**Connections.**

*At Gilroy,* connects with cars of S. F. & S. J. R. R. for San Francisco.  
*At San Juan,* connects with stages for Watsonville and Santa Cruz, New Idria, Castroville, Salinas City, and Monterey.  
*At San Luis Obispo,* connects with stage for San Simeon.  
*At Los Angeles,* connects with stages for San Diego, Fort Yuma and Tucson, San Bernardino, La Paz and Clear Creek.

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**GILROY and SULPHUR SPRINGS.**  
CAVANA'S STAGE LINE.

Stages leave Gilroy daily at 12.30 P. M.; arrive at Canada de Los Assos at 2.30 P. M.; distance 8 miles; fare \$1.00; arrive at Hot Sulphur Springs at 3.30 P. M.; distance 15 miles; through fare \$2.00. Returning, leave Hot Springs at 8 A. M.; arrive at Gilroy at 11 A. M. Connect at Gilroy with stages for Santa Cruz, Watsonville and Monterey, and cars for San Francisco.



- To travel past Encino, you would have to pay an additional \$4 for the next 14 miles. This would take you up over the Santa Susana Pass to the Mountain Station in Simi also known as “Larry’s Mountain Station” run by resident manager, Lawrence Howard.

- Mountain Station was at the foot of the pass, just south of today’s Corriganville Park, southwest of Train Tunnel # 26.

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- On the way from Encino to Mountain Station, you would stop at La Cuesta (the Slope), the De la Ossa Stagecoach Swing Station in what is now the State Park.
- Fresh horses were available just as you started up the incline. There were also rock-lined water-filled cisterns, additional tack and supplies, along with a blacksmith forge.
- The 1871 map to the right, from the Huntington Library, identifies the Stage stop in the red circle.
- The area is identified as “**Las Pilitas**” (the fountains), a historically significant source of water.





- During the 1899-1904 Southern Pacific Railroad tunneling project to Simi Valley, the aquifer that fed the wells and springs of the area was pierced, to the point that water needed to be trucked up to Box Canyon residents.
- As a result, the springs at Las Pilitas are no longer active.

**Erickson & Peterson are encountering some water in the Chatsworth tunnel. The work is progressing faster since they put in burley drills.**

The above July 31, 1901 Los Angeles Times article identifies that water is found in the tunnel.



# Traveling on Devil's Slide

- This Stagecoach road earned the name "Devil's Slide"



- THE STEEP CLIMB... required the passengers to get out and walk, carrying rocks to put behind the wheels to hold the wagon when the horses needed to stop and catch their breath.



A 2006 Hike following a fire in the hills



- THE DESCENT... Mrs. Gertrude Black describes her 1884 trip down the grade: “Going down hill the timid ones again walked. The wagon descended after the horses were blindfolded so they would not spook.

- If the driver relied on brakes alone, there would be, as one passenger described, “a streak of fire” as the brake shoes rubbing along the wagon wheels’ iron rims overheated.

- Among the techniques used to slow down their descent included drivers using chains to augment the wooden brakes. The two wheels on either side were firmly tied together with strong rope or chains to help with the braking.

- The other method was what was called a “wolf walk,” used to prevent the wagon from running into the team on the way down. It consisted of chaining a rear wheel in place to the wagon’s brake rod and a wooden timber placed through the rear spokes that locked both wheels under the chassis.





- Laborers drilled and blasted out sections of the flanking sandstone cliffs to widen the road down from the pass.
- Photo at left shows drainage channel, pick marks
- Photo at right shows presence of wheel gouges cut into the sandstone





- In 1875 the Coast Line Stage Company (partially owned by Wells, Fargo & Company) took over the stage line from Butterfield.
- The new stagecoach owners abandoned the Santa Susana Pass route in favor of the old Coast Route to Ventura via the Conejo Grade. The route included new way stations at Newbury Park and Vejar, between Encino and Calabasas.
- **The 1876 completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad tunnel through the Newhall Pass replaced travel by stagecoach between Los Angeles and San Francisco.**
- After 1876, local ranchers and farmers continued to use the Stagecoach Trail. The Simi Land and Water Company brought prospective buyers from San Fernando to the Simi Hotel in Simi Valley.



# The only known historic photo on Devils Slide

- In the book “Santa Susana” by Bill Appleton, the driver is identified as Joe Horner, who ran the Simi Stage from the Simi Hotel to San Fernando in **1890**.
- To our knowledge, it is the only historic photo of the Stagecoach Trail in use.





# 1890 Devils Slide photo recreated in 2015



In April 2015 Teena Takata recreated the 1890 photo with some local hikers. Her comments were that what amazed her most was the maintained roadway in the 1890 photo compared to the sandstone boulders we travel through today.

# The 1895 Chatsworth Grade Road

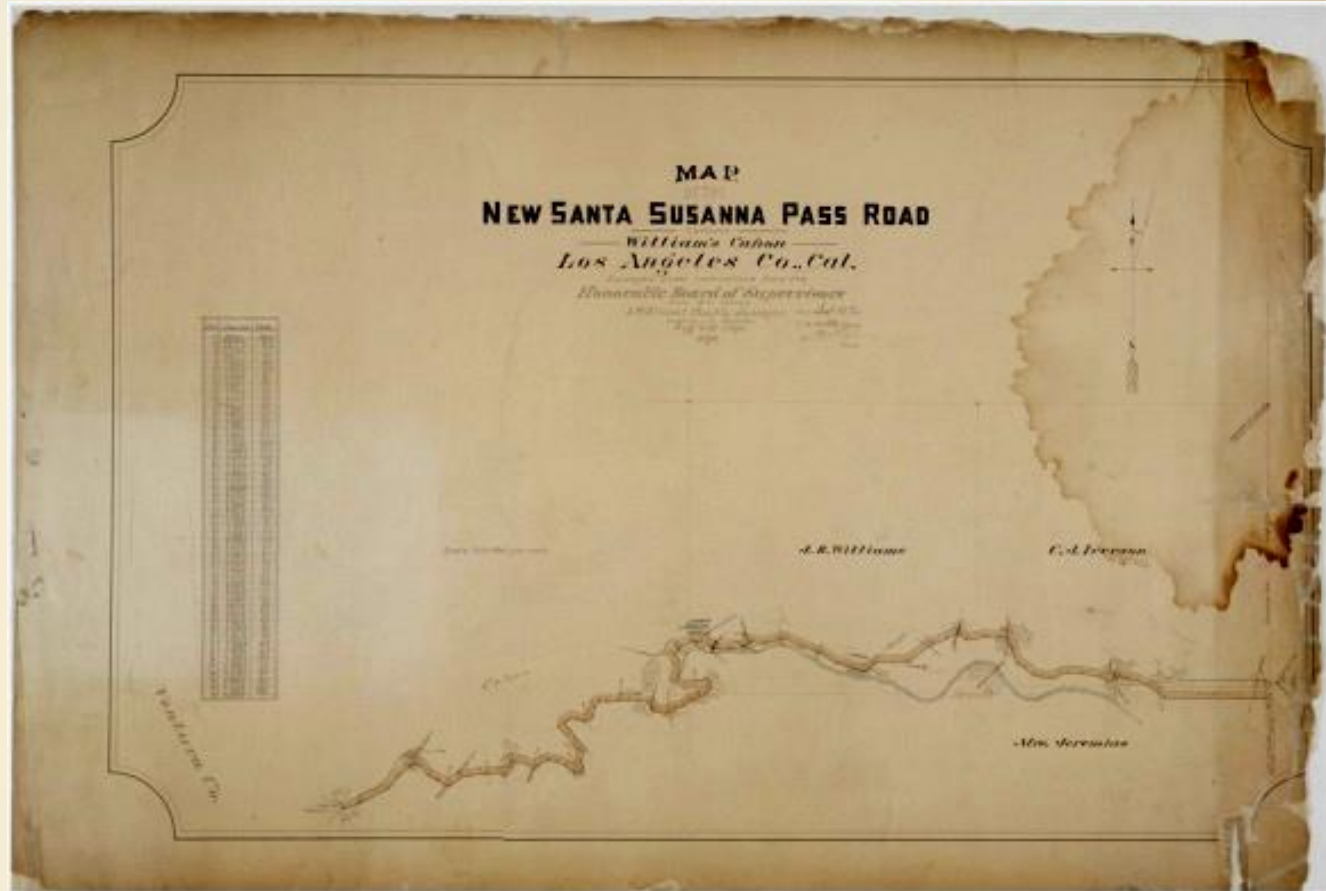
- In 1895 Los Angeles County built a new road to the north of the Stagecoach Trail, just south of Santa Susana Creek.
- This dirt road was cut into the pass and featured turnouts and retaining walls built of dimensional sandstone from the Bannon quarry.





# The 1895 Chatsworth Grade Road

- Officially named the “New Santa Susanna Pass Road (through William’s Cañon)”, it was later referred to as the Chatsworth Grade Road.
- In the SSPSHP, it is named “El Camino Nuevo”.



“New Santa Susanna Pass Road (through William’s Cañon)”  
1893 map from the Huntington Library

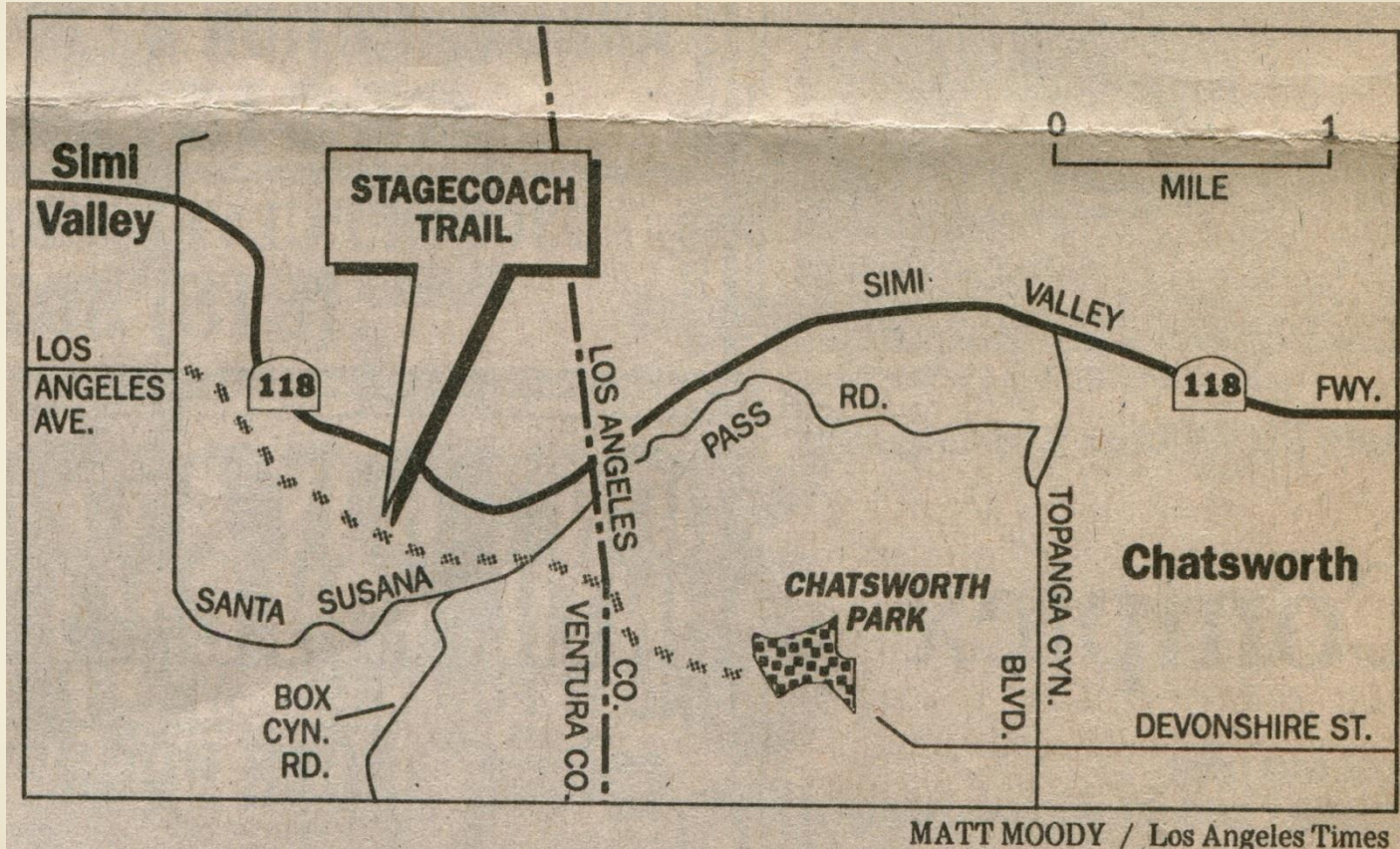
# The Santa Susana Pass Road

- In 1917 a third “Santa Susana Pass Road” was completed, an asphalt paved road just north of the Chatsworth Grade Road.
- This road was just north of Santa Susana Creek.





In **1979** State Route 118, the "Simi Valley-San Fernando Valley Freeway" opened, north of the Santa Susana Pass Road.



# The 1939 Old Santa Susana Stage Road Monument

- On March 17, 1939, A dedication ceremony commemorating the Stagecoach Trail at Devils Slide was held by The Native Daughters of the Golden West.
- The event was captured on movie film.
- The movie was donated by Betty Summers. It belonged to her Aunt Olga Bay, who was a member of the Native Daughters of the Golden West and a participant in the dedication ceremony.
- Other members of the Native Daughters were Betty's mother Hildur and Minnie Hill Palmer.



Minnie Hill-Palmer, a member of the Native Daughters determined that the sign should be made of small tiles to give it an old-fashioned appearance.



Taken in 2007, this photo shows the current status of the sign today.

2007 photo by Floyd Bariscale, a historian who documented a recent hike in our hills on the internet with some excellent quality photographs





# Dedication of The Stagecoach Trail Newspaper article published March 20, 1939 in the Van Nuys News



## FOUR HUNDRED SEE MARKING OF PASS ROAD

GARDEN • HOMEMAKING



Miss Wynan is the actress who in costume played the character in last year's play. She had part of it in that production.

### Note Anniversary of Church Society

The 70th anniversary of the national Women's Foreign Missionary Society will be observed by the Van Nuys organization of the Pacific Methodist Episcopal church Thursday night, a program scheduled for 10:30 p. m. in the home of Mrs. George E. Thane, 16125 Northridge street.

### Delta Gamma Alumnae to Aid Nursery School

Members of an active alumni group, of Delta Gamma, national college society, for this purpose was affected at a tea held recently in the home of Mrs. Mac-

## FOUR HUNDRED SEE MARKING OF PASS ROAD

### Native Daughter Rites Impressive at Summit of Chatsworth Hill

Three generations of the first American family to pioneer in the Chatsworth district viewed the marking of their historic old stagecoach road through Santa Susana pass Friday by the Topanga Purlor, Native Daughters of the Golden West.

Charles Johnson, 74, gray-haired

# FOUR HUNDRED SEE MARKING OF PASS ROAD

Newspaper Article published in The Van Nuys News, Monday, March 20, 1939

## **Native Daughter Rites Impressive at Summit of Chatsworth Hill**

*Three generations of the first American family to pioneer in the Chatsworth district viewed the marking of their historic old stagecoach road through the Santa Susana Pass Friday by the Topanga Parlor, Native Daughters of the Golden West.*

*Charles Johnson, 74, gray-haired son of the N. C. Johnson family who came to the San Fernando Valley in 1871, climbed the steep rugged trail to witness the event.*

*Holding the small hand of little Glenna Jeanne Pogue, 3, great-grand daughter of the first settlers, Johnson stood proudly by as the American flag and the banner of the Native Daughters were unfurled over the rock.*



Newspaper Article published in The Van Nuys News, Monday, March 20, 1939

*Other descendants of early families and a crowd of 400 spectators assembled for the rites.*

*The people had to walk a quarter of a mile with huge rocks as their stepping stones to reach the summit of the pass. Some were garbed in early American attire. Others brought relics found years ago along the stagecoach road – old wheels, rusty horse shoes, and great iron kettles used for preparing meals for covered wagon travelers during long journeys.*

*The air was full of winged insects and the faintest perfume from blue buckthorn which clung in patches to the sides of the mountains.*

*As many as could crowded out onto the ledge at the crest of the pass. Others stood or perched on rocks below.*

Newspaper Article published in The Van Nuys News, Monday, March 20, 1939

*Trumpet fanfare was played by 60 girls from Canoga Park in uniform. Mary Millane King wove the saga of the pass into a glowing tribute to Chatsworth pioneers and their posterity.*

*Mrs. Edna B. Briggs, grand president of the Native Daughters accepted the site as one of Los Angeles' historic landmarks. The plaque itself was tile, cemented to the side of a great rock eight feet above the road.*



A four minute  
Movie Film of the  
1939 Dedication  
Ceremony

On our  
chatsworthhistory1  
YouTube Channel

at

<https://youtu.be/7vkSl6r3X94>

# 1939 Movie Film of Dedication Ceremony



Emma Graves

Mrs. Miranda

Mary Millane King

Mrs. Edna Briggs

Charles Johnson

Minnie Hill Palmer

Bob Turner

Jim Summers

Dorothy Johnson Pogue



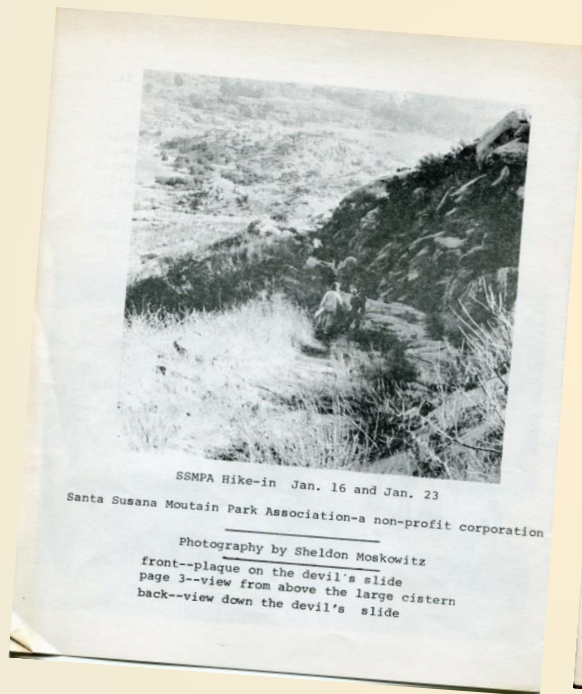


# 1939 Movie Film of Dedication Ceremony



Bob Turner with rope, Jim Summers age 11, in back left

# In 1974 the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association held an event to commemorate 35 years after the setting of the Stagecoach marker.





# 1974 SSMPA Commemoration Brochure

2

## AROUND THE STAGECOACH TRAIL

Over the centuries, many groups of people have found the San Fernando Valley to be a desirable place to live. The early inhabitants are gone now but they left their mark in many places around the valley.

One of the best places to see the transition from one group to another is found on the hillside overlooking Chatsworth Park South. Here, in a small area, can be found traces of three distinct groups: Indians, Spanish and Americans.

Indian inhabitants left pictures (pictographs) painted on a rock overlooking a midden (trash dump) containing debris from a village that was nearby. Archaeologists find middens to be a rich source of arrowheads, pottery and other non-decaying artifacts.

Up the hill from the midden are the remains of a foundation believed to be Spanish in origin. It is thought to have been built for the widow of Vincente De La Osa, the man who originally owned what is now Los Encinos State Historic Park about ten miles to the south-east. The building was later used as a way station on the stage coach trail.

The remains of the stage trail can still be seen. Even from a distance of several miles one can see the scar on the hillside where the trail was picked out of the rock over a hundred years ago. The trail linked the San Fernando Valley with the Simi Valley and points north from 1859 to 1890. So steep was this trail that it was necessary to set the brakes on the stage and tie its wheels before starting down. Sparks would fly as the metal tires slid down the rocky trail.

3

Several cisterns are to be found on the hillside. It is not known exactly when they were built but they probably provided water for the De La Osa family.

It is easy to understand why so many people found this hillside a good place to live. Its magnificent view of the San Fernando Valley and its spectacular beauty make this a place that all people enjoy and it should be preserved for this reason as well as for its rich historic past.





# 1974 Van Nuys News

Article asking for help identifying  
1939 Monument Plaque  
participants



**THIRTY-FIVE** years ago members of Topanga Parlor 269, Native Daughters of the Golden West, posed for this picture following dedication of marker at "Devil's Slide" area of old stagecoach trail in Santa Susana Mountains above Chatsworth Park. Standing

in front row fourth from left wearing shawl is Minnie Palmer, now in her late 80s. Identification of other women is being sought by Santa Susana Mountain Park Association which will celebrate anniversary of marker ceremony Sunday.







Native Daughter Participants  
identified:

1. Minnie Hill Palmer (53 yrs old)
2. Emma Johnson Graves (66)
3. Viola Penland (54) (her great granddaughter is Cindy Henderson)
4. Dorothy Johnson Pogue (31)
5. Charlotte Johnson Apuzzo (17)









# SANTA SUSANA PASS MARKED AS GATEWAY OF SETTLERS

1939  
Los Angeles  
Times



Mrs. Emma Graves, first white woman born in West San Fernando Valley, is pictured at plaque unveiled yesterday on Santa Susana Pass by Native Daughters of Golden West.



Charles Johnson, Chatsworth pioneer; Mrs. Glenn Pogue, his granddaughter; Glenna Pogue, shown at ceremony.

Times photos

# Is Topango misspelled in the 1939 Plaque?

- A search brings up the somewhat common use of Topango as an alternate spelling to Topanga in the 20's and 30's, as seen in the map to the right.
- In the 1934 Chatsworth voter registers, all live on Topango; in 1938, a mix of Topango and Topanga, in 1944 the split is 60/40 Topanga/Topango.
- Which brings us to the 1939 Stagecoach Plaque, which reads in part “Native Daughters of the Golden West Topango Parlor 269”. It has been said that Topanga was misspelled as Topango, that the maker of the plaque made a mistake.
- However considering the wide use of the spelling Topango in the mid 30s, our theory is that **the plaque was not misspelled**. And if it was, the sign maker could have easily corrected it, as the plaque is made of small tiles.



1936 Map Topango Canyon

# The Plaque's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

- On Saturday, March 20, 1999, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains hosted a commemoration ceremony at Chatsworth Park South in the Recreation Center.
- The three ladies cutting cake all were at the 1939 ceremony:
  - Charlotte Johnson Apuzzo (17 yrs old in 1939)
  - Dorothy Johnson Pogue (31 yrs old in 1939, 91 yrs old at the time of the picture)
  - Glenna Pogue Sanders (3 yrs old at the 1939 event)
- Nancy Razanski and Randy Sederquest are in the back row.





# The Plaque's 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

On Sunday, March 17, 2019, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains hosted a commemoration ceremony at Chatsworth Park South in the Recreation Center.

Participants cutting the cake, left to right, are Native Daughters of the Golden West, Placerita Parlor #277, Deanna Freeman Gorman, Jennifer Brittingham, President Judy Sanders, Past Grand President Beth Perrin, Councilman Greig Smith, Nancy Razanski, and Glenn Bailey.



# Chatsworth 125th Birthday Anniversary Hike

2013 Hike Sponsored by  
the Santa Susana  
Mountain Park  
Association and the  
Foundation for the  
Preservation of the  
Santa Susana State  
Historic Park.





# 80th Anniversary Plaque Hike

2019 Hike  
Sponsored by the  
Foundation for the  
Preservation  
of the Santa  
Susana State  
Historic Park.

Many hikes were led  
that day.....

Photo by Teena Takata





# Sources/Acknowledgements

“Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park Cultural Resources Inventory and Historic Overview”, Alexander D. Bevil, Historian, California State Parks, 2007. [sspshp historic resources.pdf](#)

David Rumsey Map Collection [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)

Old Stagecoach Trail - Fact Sheet 11-97 by Albert Knight, Vice President, Santa Susana Mountain Park Association

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