

A 'GREEN' GEM TO OPEN, 4 YEARS AFTER CEDAR FIRE

BY LISA PETRILLO

STAFF WRITER – UNION TRIBUNE - SEPTEMBER 14, 2007

POWAY – The Goodan Ranch, parkland devastated by the October 2003 Cedar fire, will mark the fourth anniversary of the worst wildfire in California history with the opening of a “green” park headquarters.

The \$2 million headquarters, interpretive center and community center in Poway is being hailed as the most ecologically friendly building in the San Diego County park system. Goodan Ranch is within the open-space preserve of Sycamore Canyon.

The park reopened within a year of the fire and the landscape has grown back to green, although the recovery is struggling because of drought conditions, said Brian Albright, assistant county parks director.



SCOTT LINNETT / Union-Tribune
Supervising park ranger Maureen Abare set up an exhibit at the new Goodan Ranch Visitors Center yesterday.

The preserve stretches from Poway to Santee, and governments in those cities oversee the parkland, as do the county and the state Department of Fish and Game.

Among the 376,000 acres scorched in the Cedar fire was most of the 2,100-acre Sycamore Canyon, once home to dozens of species, including bobcats and gnatcatchers, and to coastal sage scrub.

“It looked like a war zone,” Albright said yesterday. “There were dead animals everywhere: deer, snakes, everything that lived here.”

About the only things left standing were the restrooms, he said.

The Kumeyaay Indians once roamed the area's rolling hills, their grinding holes and *metates* still in evidence.

“This is the way it looked when the covered wagons came through,” Albright said of the peaceful preserve, only minutes from urban sprawl.

The 10 acres of trails now fill with hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers, but the park is closed to motorized vehicles. Dogs on leashes are allowed.

At the foot of the canyon after the fire, a stand of sycamores and oaks remained, still-lush trees that have stood for hundreds of years.

“Like a little glimmer of hope,” Albright said.

The grove surrounds the ruins of the original ranch house, built in the 1930s by the family of May Chandler Goodan, whose family made its fortune publishing the *Los Angeles Times*. The house served as the park headquarters until fire destroyed it, leaving only the foundation and walls of river rock and mortar.

Near the ruins is the new park headquarters, which opens Oct. 26, where visitors will be able to see vintage photos of the heiress plowing her fields. This was a working ranch in a stretch of Poway that remains filled with horse stables.

The 3,200-square-foot headquarters was built with “green” building techniques that aim to reduce the impact on the environment with energy savings and recycled materials.

In the designs by Platt/Whitelaw Architects of San Diego, the pathways use decomposed granite instead of asphalt. The high-peaked ceilings feature overhangs to block heat gain. The building was equipped with energy-efficient appliances and plenty of double-paned windows for maximum natural lighting and minimum temperature loss.

It is cooled with an evaporative cooler and stays warm with a heat pump and wood-burning stove. It was built with steel framing and fire-resistant exteriors including concrete-based siding, which also keeps termites at bay.

“This will be the new standard (for regional park buildings),” Albright predicted.

Goodan Ranch

The new headquarters and community center at the Goodan Ranch in Poway will open after a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 1 p.m. Oct. 26.

Lisa Petrillo: (760) 737-7563; lisa.petrillo@uniontrib.com