

# Park group wages uphill fight for restoration of ranch house

STRUCTURE NOT PART OF POST-FIRE PLAN FOR GOODAN OPEN SPACE

**BY BOOYEON LEE - UT STAFF WRITER - JULY 17, 2005**

POWAY – About a mile down the hill from the end of Sycamore Canyon Road is a charred skeleton of what used to be a ranch house.

The 75-year-old structure, tucked away in the valley of Goodan Ranch, had offered respite for hikers, bikers and horseback riders who came through the county park, and served as an office for park rangers.

Once the center of a thriving 9,000-acre ranch, the stone house burned almost two years ago when the Cedar fire swept through most of the park and the adjacent Sycamore Canyon preserve. The Sycamore Canyon/Goodan Ranch Open Space Preserve covers 2,100 acres.

The Friends of Goodan Ranch, made up of park users, is pleading with county officials to restore the home.

"If you love Western heritage, this is it," said Robert Coates, the group's vice president.

Last week, Coates stood near the burned shell of the building where only a wooden fence and a public restroom survived the flames.

"This is a piece of Poway history we can preserve," he said.

But it may be a while before the old house is restored.

The state and county and the cities of Santee and Poway, which together bought the park in 1991, have decided to build a new interpretive center next to the ranch house and leave the remains of the building as they are. The blueprint for the proposed 3,200-square-foot building includes an area for educational displays, a meeting room and a small auditorium for about 40 people.

"It's amazing that we're already looking at a new design," said Robert Clark, Poway's community service director. "Typically, it could take a city several years to process something like this."

The county recently took over the day-to-day operation of the park, which had been shared with the city.

"It will be far nicer than what we've had there previously," Clark said. "The fire's now become a part of the history of the ranch. Preserving the remains of the ranch house would be an interesting exhibit."

The new interpretive center will cost \$1.4 million, paid for by insurance money from the fire. County officials are rushing to begin construction by next spring to meet the December 2007 deadline to use the money.

Historical restoration of the ranch house would take longer, said Matt Bohan, the county's chief of park development. Because the old ranch house did not meet current access standards for public buildings, upgrading it as a community center would be costly, he said.

Members of the Friends of Goodan Ranch appear to have given up on trying to persuade the county to spend the insurance money on the ranch house.

"It's a done deal," said DeAnne Erickson, treasurer for the group. "We're just looking for another way to save this home. I just loved the look of it."

Erickson said she had been riding her horse to the stone house for 30 years before the ranch became public.

Supervisor Dianne Jacob said county staffers are working on a cost estimate for restoring the ranch house. It would be a project separate from the interpretive center.

Jacob said the plan for the interpretive center has been presented at public meetings several times since December 2003.

"We've been through a lengthy process, and there was a consensus," she said. "The Friends were involved all along."

She said the Joint Powers Authority – made up of representatives from the four public entities that run the park – did not hear about a desire to restore the ranch house until a February meeting, when the county-hired architects presented drawings of three alternative blueprints for the interpretive center.

The stone house is not considered historic. It failed to qualify for the National Register of Historic Places when it was evaluated in 2000, said county historian Lynne Christenson.

The century-old caretaker's house next to the ranch house, which was eligible for the national register, was also destroyed by the fire, along with numerous outbuildings.

The ranch was once owned by May Chandler Goodan, whose family had been publishers of the *Los Angeles Times*. Signal Landmark Development Inc. bought 321 acres of what was left of the

ranch in 1987, then sold it in 1991 to the Joint Powers Authority for \$3.6 million. The county contributed \$2 million and the state, Poway and Santee paid the rest.

Before Goodan Ranch became a public park, it was once considered for a state prison, a 460-unit mobile home park and a tract of luxury homes.

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