

THE **insider**

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The Santiago Fires: A Lesson in Fire Ecology

Erin Eberhart and Lori Kiesser

How the fires affected Inside the Outdoors

On October 21, 2007, a fire was started in Santiago Canyon not far from Rancho Soñado, home to Inside the Outdoors®(ITO) offices and also one of ITO's environmental education field trip sites. The fire was fueled by extremely dry plants and pushed by the hot dry Santa Ana winds. When firefighters got the upper hand on the Santiago Fire, the fire had burned approximately 28,400 acres, including a portion of Rancho Soñado. The news coverage was significant as we all watched the fire burn the homes of the people and wildlife living in the Santiago burn area.

Rancho Soñado was in the path of the fire and a significant portion of

the site burned. Fortunately, none of the buildings were touched by the fire due in part to the excellent fire clearance and the hard work of the firefighters. The Wild Bill Trail, an ITO teaching trail, and three teaching structures were burned.

Even though ITO had received word that we had lost most of the existing teaching areas at Rancho Soñado, we recognized that school children visiting the site would get the opportunity of a lifetime. The Santiago Fire provided the chance for school children to visit a burn area and see how important fire is to the ecosystems in Southern California. Students learn about the fire triangle, fire as decomposer, oak adaptations, succulent adaptations, re-sprouting,

animal adaptations, fuel build-up, seeds, and fire scars. In addition, we are documenting the new growth around Rancho Soñado by taking pictures from designated spots every week. These pictures will be posted on our website so that teachers, students and the public can watch Rancho Soñado grow back after the fire.

Why is fire important?

In Southern California we experience cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. This Mediterranean climate is perfect for chaparral ecosystems and very conducive to regular fires.

Rancho Soñado is surrounded

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A Message from ITO Foundation President Susan Brown

Childhood camping experiences connected Susan to the natural world and inspired her to share that awe with thousands of school children.

Nurturing a Natural Curiosity: Stories from ITO Students

Melody, a sixth-grader from James Guinn Elementary School in Anaheim shares a story about her week at ITO Outdoor Science School.

Insider Information

What's inside:

- * Staff Profile
- * ITO Foundation Spring events
- * Gifts with Purpose



SUSAN BROWN ITOF Board President

My parents instilled a love and respect of nature through wonderful camping adventures we took. Girl Scouts enhanced an awe of the outdoors. As a teacher I jumped at the chance for my students to experience nature as I had as a child, through an invitation to Outdoor Science School. Not only did that week change their lives, it changed mine.

I observed the joy of students connecting with nature which also reflected in their attitudes and behavior back at school. As an administrator I observed this phenomenon with children who went on local nature preserve and park field trips, but it wasn't until I transferred to an inner city school that I learned the true power of nature.

For most of my students Outdoor Science School was the first time they had three nutritious meals a day, slept in a bed and walked outside at night without being afraid of gangs and gunfire. I will never forget observing my students the first time they viewed the Milky Way and a shooting star. The "ahh's" of amazement were worth the time spent on numerous fund-raising projects.

The week experiencing nature was extremely powerful for these students. It gave them hope for a better future. In sixth grade, students were assigned an essay on their lives in twenty years. Several of the boys said they would probably not even be alive. Their uncle had been killed in gang

violence, their brother was in prison. A few wanted to be famous athletes, but most didn't have a vision. The girls mainly said they would be married with several children.

Upon returning from camp, their outlook had changed. Many wanted to be camp counselors, scientists or rangers. I'm not sure if any became scientists or rangers, but I do know that many more of these students graduated from high school and are productive members of society and caretakers of the earth.

It's been 30 years since I took my trip with sixth graders to Outdoor Science School for the first time. Since then it has been my passion to get as many students as possible to experience and connect with nature. I have been very fortunate as a teacher, administrator and foundation member to assist in making that dream a reality.

Over 40% of the students who attend Inside the Outdoors programs receive sponsorship. Without generous donor support, many students would not have the opportunity to experience the wonder of nature first hand.



Santiago Fires

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by the chaparral ecosystem.

While every chaparral community is different, fire has historically come through the area around Rancho Soñado every 20 to 30 years. The plants in the chaparral are adapted to survive regular fires and some even rely on fire for continued survival. Fire is a source of renewal. The closed canopy created by the woody and semi-woody shrubs of a mature chaparral ecosystem shade out the lower growing herbaceous plants. Fire opens this canopy and creates space for herbaceous plants such as grasses and wildflowers.

Outdoor Science School

Melody Taghdis, Sixth Grader

James Guinn Elementary, Anaheim City School District



Student Story

“Oh, my gosh! I can’t believe a bird is eating food out of my hand!” I exclaimed excitedly in my head. It was a life experience I’ll never forget. While on the Wildlife Biology hike, I was standing as still as a statue with birdseed in my hand. Suddenly one beautiful, graceful, and colorful bird landed on my hand and started eating! One minute after the first bird left, another one came and so the pattern started. I managed to get four birds to eat food from my hand and not only that, but a couple more birds flew elegantly around my head so fast that I got scared, jumped out of position, and spilled the rest of my bird seeds on the forest floor.

This is just one example of the many trails and activities my classmates and I experienced at Outdoor Science School in December. I had been waiting for that week for more than a year. It was like waiting for a scorching pot of pasta to finish cooking. I saved my money and participated in school

fundraisers. Luckily, my school was fortunate enough to receive scholarship assistance from a generous, anonymous donor in Orange County. It really brought the fee down. Thank you, whoever you are!

At OSS, I also enjoyed cracking open rocks on the Geology Trail and learning about how living and non-living things interact on the Ecology Trail. This week in the mountains taught us that we are all in this together. What we do to the earth affects us all. We were at the Calvary site where the recent wildfires stopped within feet of the camp. We saw up close the damage fire can cause, but our instructors also taught us that fire is one of the many cycles in nature and it actually helps the environment. By losing old, taller trees, the younger saplings will have more of a chance to grow and the burnt trees and bushes are now part of the soil cycle, making the soil rich in nutrients.

The food was delicious and we ate so much! I loved sharing a cabin with my friends and making new friends from another school. It was like having a sleepover every night. We had a blast at the Hoe Down learning dances to “Car Wash” and “Thriller”.

The last night was skit night where we all got to go on stage and perform skits about ecology. The ending was sad yet inspirational. I absolutely fancied every single phrase each teacher spoke at the closing candlelight ceremony.

This trip effected me deep to the core and it is a memory I promise I’ll never forget. It was a true-life experience that taught me many life skills needed. I lived it, breathed, and most importantly, enjoyed it!



LEETA LATHAM Staff Profile

Passionate about the outdoors and the opportunity to share her knowledge with kids, Leeta Latham began her career with Inside the Outdoors in 1995 as an Instructor with Outdoor Science School. Since then, Leeta has worked at every ITO field trip site and as a Traveling Scientist in schools. She currently works in the Rancho Soñado Field Office as a Program Support Specialist maintaining equipment, vehicles, animal facilities and supplies.

Leeta got her degree in Geology at Cal State Long Beach. She credits ITO with giving her better teaching tools, continuous environmental education training and an understanding of curriculum writing.

One of Leeta’s most memorable moments was when an innercity student attending Outdoor Science School asked if the mountains were real. The beautiful scenery was something the student had never experienced in-person before. It’s these experiences that encourage a lifetime of environmental advocacy.

Leeta has seen the program grow ten-fold over the past 12 years and is excited to see ITO strengthen its community programs and environmental activism.

Event Calendar Mar-May 2008

MAR 1ST Sustainable Cooking Class

Santiago Park,
Santa Ana
2:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Kids of all ages will have fun creating food masterpieces at this food event brought to you by Inside the Outdoors, Avanti Cafe, and South Coast Farms. Families explore their food footprint while learning to make quick and healthy entrees and desserts from locally grown organic foods.

APR 12TH Getting Ready for Summer!

Rancho Soñado,
Silverado
4:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Inside the Outdoors & REI invite you to get ready for summer by joining us for s'mores, camp songs & stories, stargazing, and a camping workshop.

**Check out our website
for Full Moon Hikes and
other event dates!**

www.insidetheoutdoors.org

MAY 3RD Eco-Fabulous Fashion Show and Chocolate Tasting

2nd Street Promenade,
Santa Ana
2:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Inside the Outdoors Foundation, Road Less Traveled, and REI invite you to celebrate Mother's Day with a fashion show that focuses on the environment with eco-friendly clothing and accessories. Before the fashion show, visit eco-fabulous exhibits and create your own fun eco-fashion crafts. Join us for a variety of irresistible organic and fair-trade chocolates at a very special party after the fashion show!

JOIN INSIDE THE OUTDOORS® FOUNDATION TODAY!

The purpose of Inside the Outdoors Foundation is to provide charitable, educational, scientific, and advisory support to the Inside the Outdoors Science Study Programs. Each year, Inside the Outdoors provides full and partial scholarships to approximately 55,000 low-income students. Inside the Outdoors is able to do this through generous donations from individuals, foundations and corporations.

As an ITO Foundation member you will enjoy special benefits described below, but the most meaningful benefit we have to offer members is the satisfaction of sharing the wonders of nature with others and cultivating tomorrow's environmental stewards.

All members will receive:
A Quarterly Newsletter and events calendar, priority registration and discounts for ITO Adventures, and Special volunteer opportunities

Annual Membership

Adventurer (\$25) Individual Membership

Explorer (\$50) Family Membership, includes:

- Enrollment for children in the bEARTHday club

- An eco-friendly reusable cooler

Steward Circle (\$100+) includes:

Explorer benefits, plus:

- Special acknowledgement on the website and newsletter

- Invitations to exclusive Steward Circle events

Membership Levels:

- Adventurer (\$25)

- Explorer (\$50)

Steward Circle

- Terra Trekker (\$100-\$399)

- Star Gazer (\$400-\$999)

- Habitat Hero (\$1,000-\$2,499)

- Dream Catcher (\$2,500-\$4,999)

- Visionary (\$5,000+)

To join, visit:

www.insidetheoutdoors.org

THE GIFT OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



"In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught."

- Baba Dioum

Each year, the seeds of environmental stewardship are planted in the thousands of students who experience ITO programs. If you are interested in learning how you can support ITO programs, please visit our website at: www.insidetheoutdoors.org for more information about Inside the Outdoors Foundation Membership and Inside the Outdoors Gifts with Purpose.



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