



Historical stone house at Keys Creek Canyon.

New hiking preserve in Keys Creek Canyon will increase Valley Center's trails options

Usually those who donate or otherwise facilitate transfers of lands for parks and preserves from private to public ownership get naming rights. When the 148 acres in Keys Creek Canyon is eventually named, it would be very appropriate to call it the “Long Time Coming” open space preserve or park.

More likely it will be called something like Keys Creek Canyon Park. It could, of course, be named after the Seiki family. The land is currently part of the Saiki Family LLC trust. It is located east of Lilac Road and west of Miller Road.

The County describes it as “high quality chaparral bisected by riparian forest that grows on either side of Keys Creek, which flows through the property.”

Rich Rudolf of the Valley Center Trails

Assn. describes it this way: “It’s like you leave Via Piedra and in five minutes you think you are in Montana! It’s real wilderness, with riparian habitat and a creek running through it. It’s fabulous!”

According to an article written by Bob Lerner of the VC Historical Society:

“Keys Creek Canyon Park Under the aegis of the Valley Center Trails Assn., several community groups launched a formal effort in 2010 to create a park and preserve covering 150-250 acres. The Brown stone house, after restoration, could serve as a nature studies facility. Keys Creek, within Keys Canyon, is a long, narrow riparian and oak woodland-lined stream bottom, which provides a high-quality wildlife habitat and is a scenic resource. Ingress to the

house would be through paths starting at Lilac and Via Piedra roads or from Valley Center and Canyon roads.”

On March 3 the Board of Supervisors will vote whether to authorize an expenditure of \$1,806,000, which includes \$36,000 for staff, appraisal and other costs to complete the transaction; \$3,500 for closing and title costs; and \$290,000 in one-time land protection costs, including installation of gates and fencing, vegetation management and stormwater/erosion protection measures.

As part of the purchase agreement the Saikis agree to set aside \$750,000 for an endowment to help pay the annual cost for monitoring and managing the property, estimated at \$39,976. This will be paid to the Department of Parks and Rec-

reation from interest earned from the endowment fund.

Once the Board of Supervisors buys the land it could be put into an

open space conservation area that could be used for hiking and riding i.e. so-called "passive" recreation. This process is the culmination of eight years of work by the Valley Center Trails Association, which never gave up on the goal, no matter how many obstacles stood in the way.

According to Rudolf the association has worked tirelessly to try to connect the dots to bring this action about. "Everywhere we turned there was an obstacle," he said. "The reason we wanted it so badly is for a destination trail to be able to visit the stone house."

The source of the funding is the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).

The Saiki family lives in El Cerrito. When first contacted by the Trails Association the family was willing to sell the land, but there were problems in that there wasn't an easement from a public road to the property.

The County insisted on a public easement to the property.

The Trails Association worked closely with Bill McMann, whose family once owned Corral Liquor, a VC landmark that burned down in December 2002. In 2008 he first expressed willingness to grant the group an easement through his property, which includes an old horse arena and farmhouse. The association was interested in acquiring his land and using the old arena as a staging area, although that never worked out.

It also worked with Rudy Pacheco, whose 39 acres lies to the west of the property and abuts Via Piedra and Lilac. Pacheco heard about the Trails Association's struggles and stepped up to help.

Another minor hero in this saga is Dick Rozelle, a former resident of Valley Center (he now lives in Arizona) who doggedly worked for years as the Saiki's Realtor. Pacheco and Rozelle worked with the Association to try to involve the Trust for Public Land, a U.S. national, nonprofit organization that conserves land for public use.

A series of meetings were also held with the Valley Center Municipal Water

District, which has another easement off Canyon Road that serves their pump station and runs through the Saiki property.

At one point the land was on the verge of being lost because two developers had an option to buy it as an 84-day water storage pond for the North South Village sewer expansion. Because of the option the County suddenly stopped talking [said it was unable to even talk] to the Association about a park.

The last obstacle was overcome when the VCTA helped the Saikis get the San Diego County Water Authority to waive its lien that accrued to the land for unpaid water availability charges (in addition to already waived similar liens of the Metropolitan Water District and VCMWD), because the land was being sold to a public entity.

The ultimate dream of the Trails Association is to connect the Keys Creek property to the former Lilac Ranch property 6.5 miles away. "This would give us a real trails system in Valley Center," says Rudolf.

"Part of why we wanted the County or parks district to acquire Saiki property was the stone house on Keys Creek, which was built by a Dr. Brown in the 1930s and maybe had a veterinary office there," said Rudolf. The stone house was abandoned in the 1950s. The stagecoach that once ran from Pauma Valley into Valley Center traveled through Keys Creek Canyon and Anthony Road and passed the stone house and came into Valley Center. "It has tremendous historical interest," he said.

Bob Lerner, Valley Center Historian at the VC History Museum, and long-time VCTA member, adds "In recent years I have led three tours to the stone house and gave a lecture on site. This is quite a remarkable piece of property."

"The County will put up a chain link fence and keep it in suspended decay until they decide whether to restore it, which could cost \$2 million," says Rudolf.

The Valley Center Historical Society also has also expressed some interest in restoring it, if a grant becomes available. There will probably be no public use for at least a year to 18 months while the county prepares a Management Plan for the preserve.

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Historic Site: Brown House (circa 1930)

Keys Creek Canyon, Valley Center

By **BOB LERNER**,
Valley Center Historical Society

This stone house was built alongside Keys Creek in Keys Canyon by a veterinarian known as Dr. Brown. The exact age of the house has not been determined; however, the property was entered on the County tax rolls under the name of Dr. Brown in 1930.

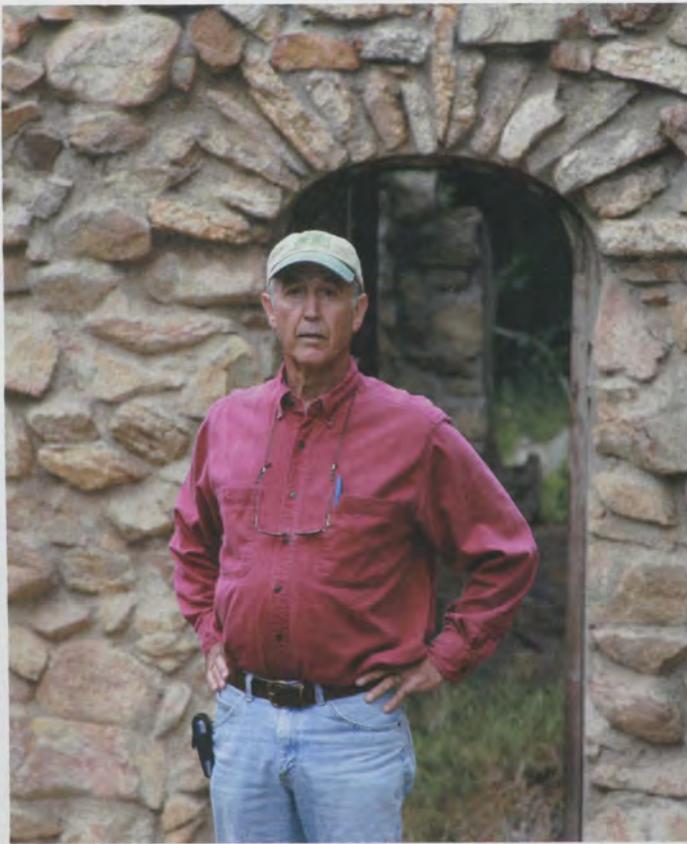
An examination of the site was conducted by a professional archaeologist from the Valley Center Historical Society in 1996 who uncovered anecdotal evidence that an earlier structure stood at the current Brown stone house site.

The earlier house may have served as a way station for passing stagecoaches. A map dated 1887 shows that Pickwick Stage Lines provided regular coach service along Keys Creek starting from the juncture of present-day Lilac and Anthony roads and continuing through the canyon to present-day Valley Center and Canyon roads. Wagon wheel ruts appear to be extant at the southern end of the route.

It is believed that Dr. Brown lived and worked in the house into the 1950's. A fire in the early 1960's destroyed much of the building. Along with neglect, there was further deterioration in 1996 when Sheriff's deputies raided a meth lab at the abandoned house.

In a family memoir, Edgar Anthony (1914-2008), one of eight siblings who lived nearby on Anthony Road, recalled, "We would visit Dr. Brown down the road".

The Anthony homestead, later the Oak Creek Boys Ranch, housed youths referred by juvenile courts. A 1976 memoir from one 16-year-old recalled the following: "The stone house was off limits, but the tale of an old stone house in the middle of the forest was too much to resist while horseback riding along the creek. As I earned privileges, I was allowed to ride to the old house and spend time metal-detecting. I found old stainless steel medical jars, a few trays, bowls, small scissors and forceps-type instruments. I was told the owner was a veterinarian doctor named Dr. Brown."



Rich Rudolph of the Valley Center Trails Association

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The land would provide MSCP mitigation land and a possible anchor for a future link to 902 acres formerly known as Rancho Lilac (no connection to the proposed Lilac Hills Ranch) once owned by Louis & Abbie Wolfsheimer, now a Mitigation Bank owned by CalTrans.

In order to provide funding for the management and monitoring of the property, the Saiki Family agreed to donate \$750,000 back from the purchase price to the San Diego Foundation to establish an endowment for the benefit of the property.

As Rudolf describes it,

“The County insisted on a public road access and an endowment so there would be no public cost to maintain the property. That meant the Saiki family had to eat the profits for selling the land and they were willing to do that.”

Overall the Trails Association worked for 7 years with the county, the property owners, the VC Parks & Rec District and the water district trying to remove all the obstacles and get the county to buy this property because it was a beautiful piece of land. Without the persistence of the trails association perhaps it wouldn't have happened at all.

And now it's about to become the common heritage of Valley Center.

