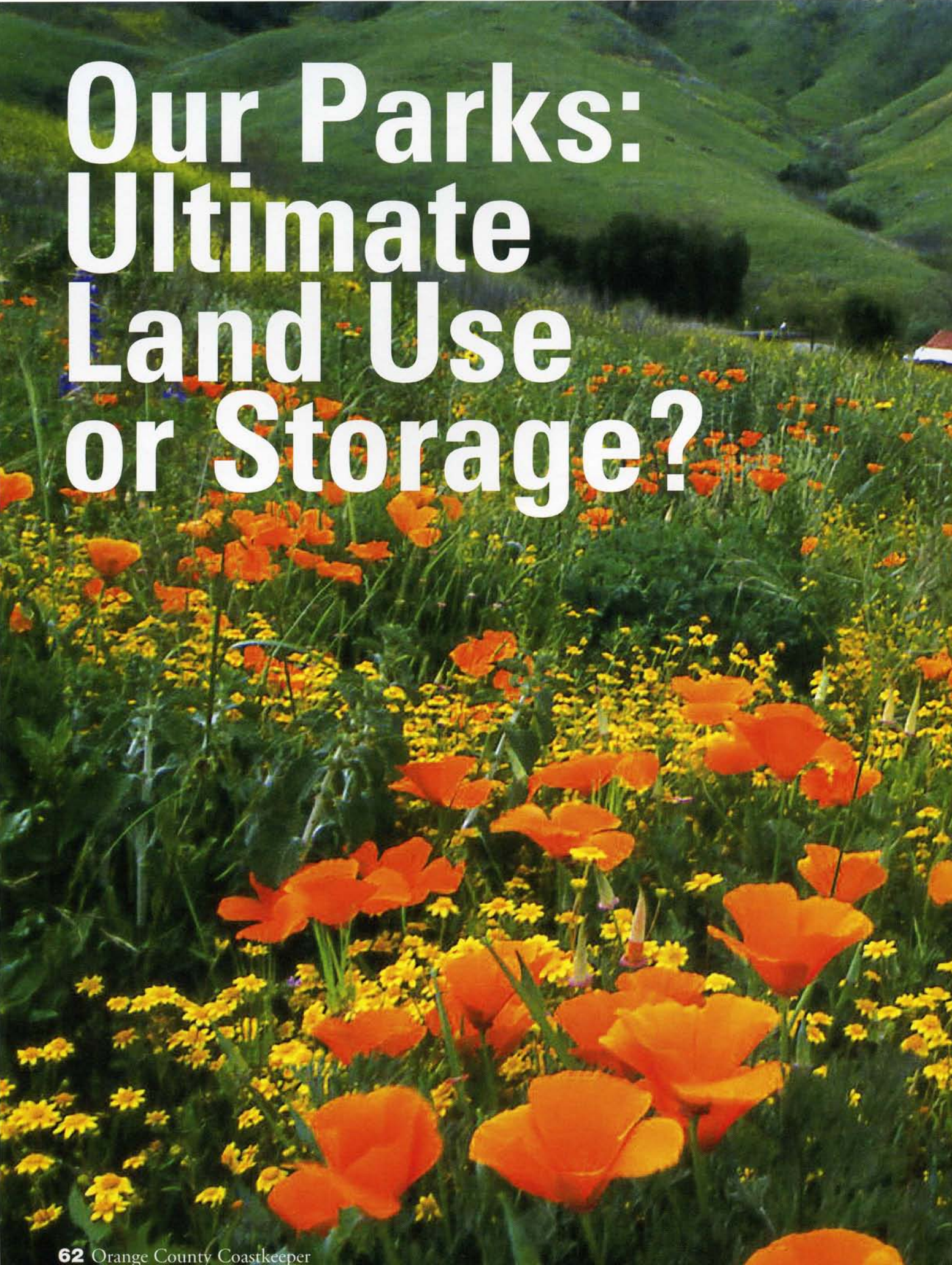


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COAST KEEPER

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Our Parks: Ultimate Land Use or Storage?



Several years ago, I visited my ancestral home in England visiting the land that my great-grandmother (times 8) left when she traveled “across the pond” to Jamestown. I decided it was time to go back and see where she and I had come from.

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Founders of Chino Hills State Park

All photography courtesy of
Hills for Everyone

landscape — both the natural and the built world. I laughed outright at a large sign at a construction site that read, “Durnell Builders-since 1591.”

I wondered what it would be like to take on builders with a legacy like that.

I was treated to their centuries old public access paths (dating back to the Roman

way that cathedrals can't.

As it turns out, parks were here from the start, as far back as Jamestown when my relatives first arrived.



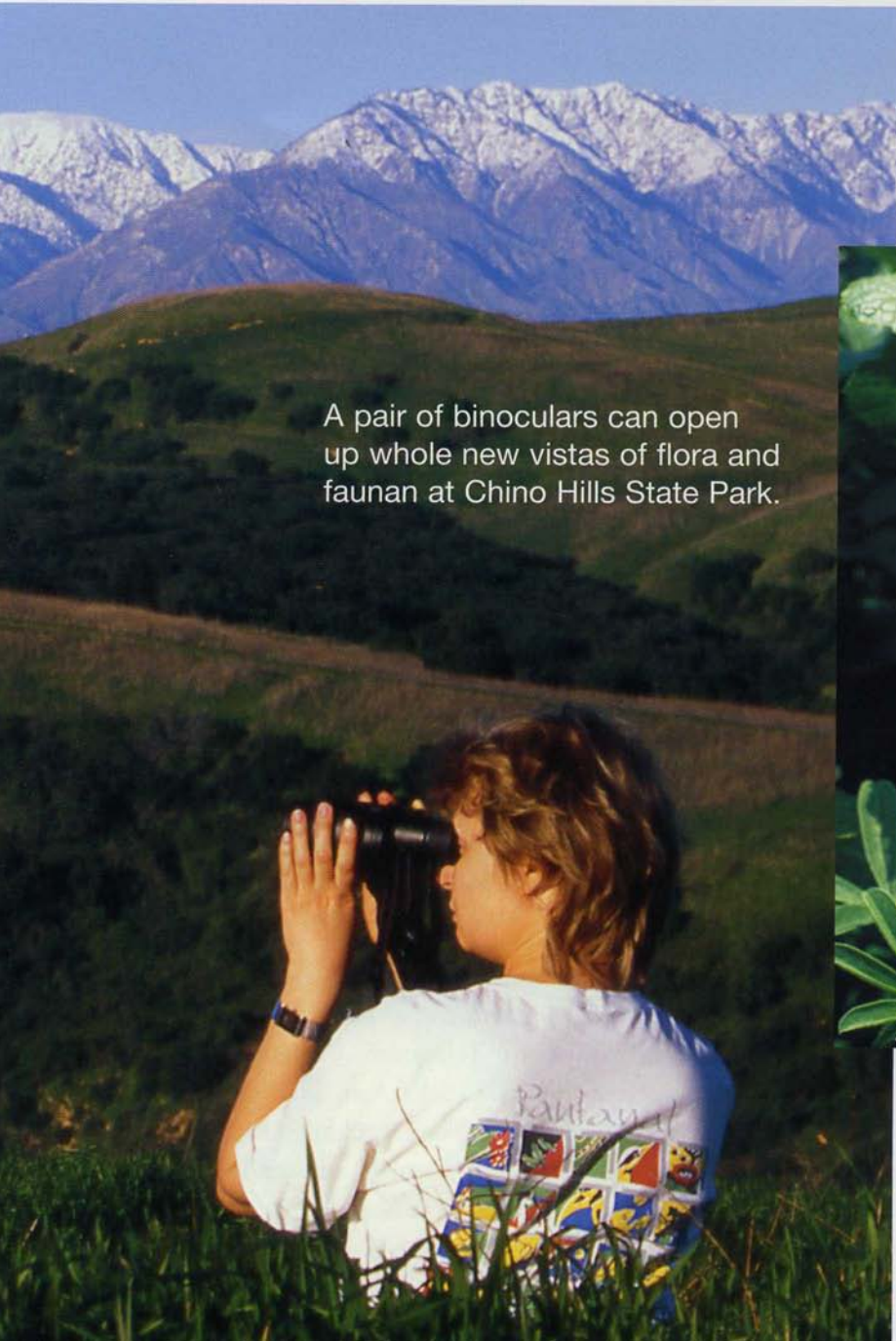
days), paths that meander on private lands throughout the countryside. I stepped foot in many ancient cathedrals and abbeys, one dating back to 705 A.D. I saw the Magna Carta where in 1215 A.D., nobles nudged forward the idea of common law.

During my trip I became embarrassed that Americans didn't have those kinds of buildings to show off. What could I show an English visitor? Disneyland? Knott's Berry Farm? As I flew home, it struck me that all of the lands that we save as parks here in America, these are our cathedrals. They weren't made by humans but they were at least saved

Back then they were called “the commons” and there-in lay the seed of the idea of public land for public good. We here in California have a particular right to be proud. Our state was entrusted with the first state park in history, our beloved Yosemite. Hearing of the threats by loggers and miners to Yosemite Valley and

to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, President Lincoln signed a bill on June 30, 1864 granting these lands to the State of California “as an inalienable public trust.” This legislation became the inspiration for

understanding the importance of public lands. We now have 278 state park units that aim to preserve significant natural, historical and cultural parts of California. At their best, these parks encourage public access so that we can better understand what we are visiting. These slices of California carry their own designations — as State Historical Parks, State Beaches, State Recreation Areas and the traditional State Parks where only those uses that pro-



A pair of binoculars can open up whole new vistas of flora and faunan at Chino Hills State Park.



tect the resources are allowed. The nine-year old nephew of the founder of Chino Hills State Park gave a more heartfelt description, “A State Park is the best thing that land can be.”

Yet many of our state parks are facing threats by the modern day versions of log-



Pristine Aliso Canyon represents a bygone era in Orange County when cattle and cowboys ruled the range.

would this road transform public land (that was set aside as mitigation for another project) into private use (toll payers) but it would also destroy the very nature of the water course that feeds the sand that creates the long continuous waves at Trestle surfing beach. But alas the story does not end there.

The northern extension of this same toll road (SR 241) appeared in the 1998 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to cut through Chino Hills State Park, connecting the 241 to Euclid Avenue in Chino Hills. Though this road was removed from the RTP, the

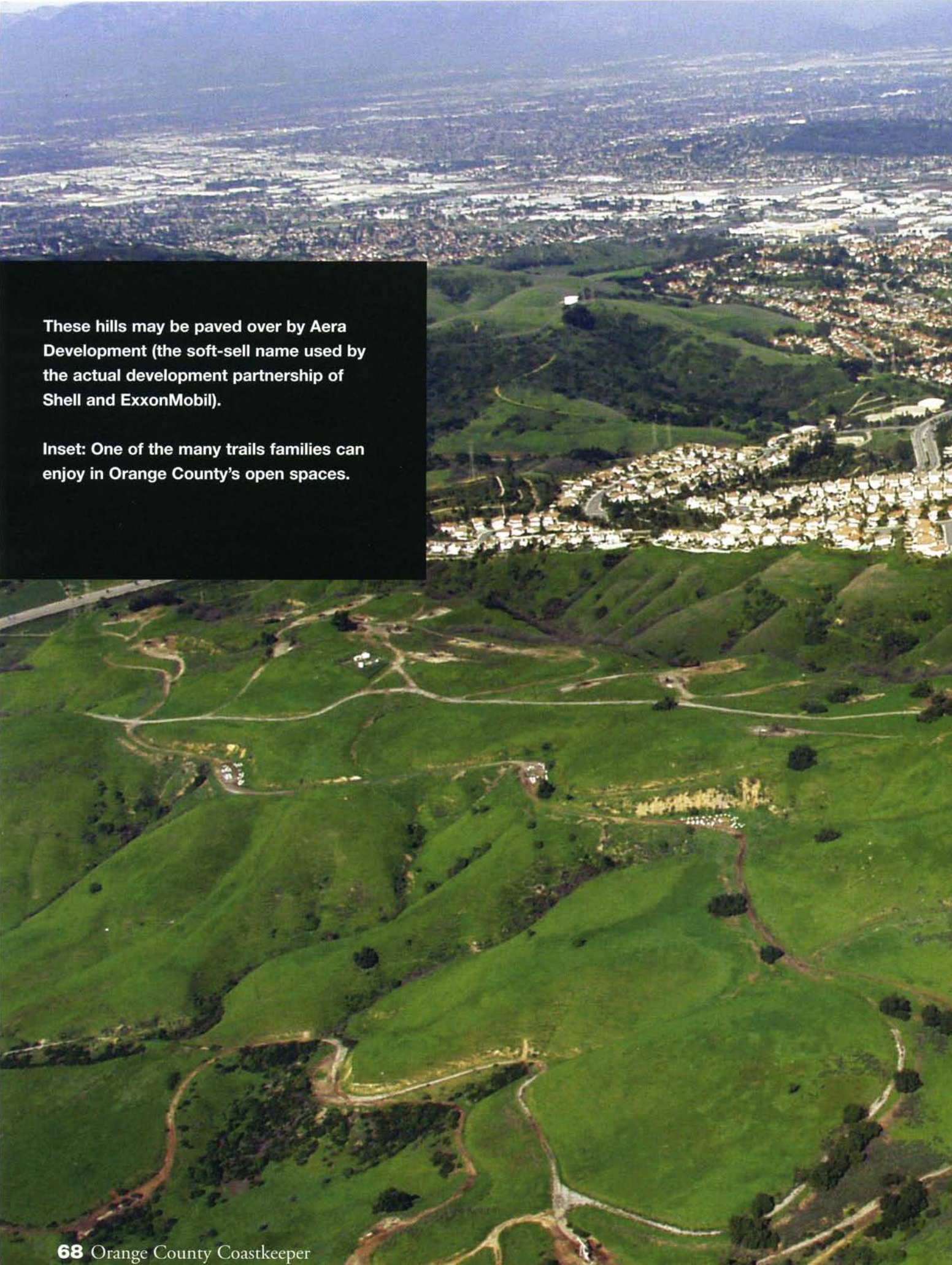
than others. The latest threat is a proposal by the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) to build a paved 24' wide secondary access road up the 45 degree forested slope of Telegraph Canyon, the formal entrance of the State Park. Astonishingly, this road is supported by State Parks in exchange for \$1.7 million that will help fund, furnish and endow a Visitor Center. Never mind MWD failed to secure a route while the south side of the plant developed over the last ten years. Never mind that a new road is not a permitted use in the Habitat Conservation Plan



we can do to open space. They result in road kill, create barriers to migration of some species, bring chemical pollution, including heavy metals that cause reproductive impairment and even death in birds and mammals that eat animals lower on the food chain. Roads facilitate invasion by non-native species, increase air pollution, damage some of our native trees, and bring noise pollution which can cause a stress reaction that changes reproduction in some species. Highways take habitat — for each mile of interstate highway it consumes up to 48 acres of habitat while altering the hydrology of watersheds through changes in water quantity and water quality, stream channel morphology, and ground water levels. Roads cause increases in peak runoff and storm discharges. They concentrate surface water flows, which increase erosion, and thus, sedimentation loads in

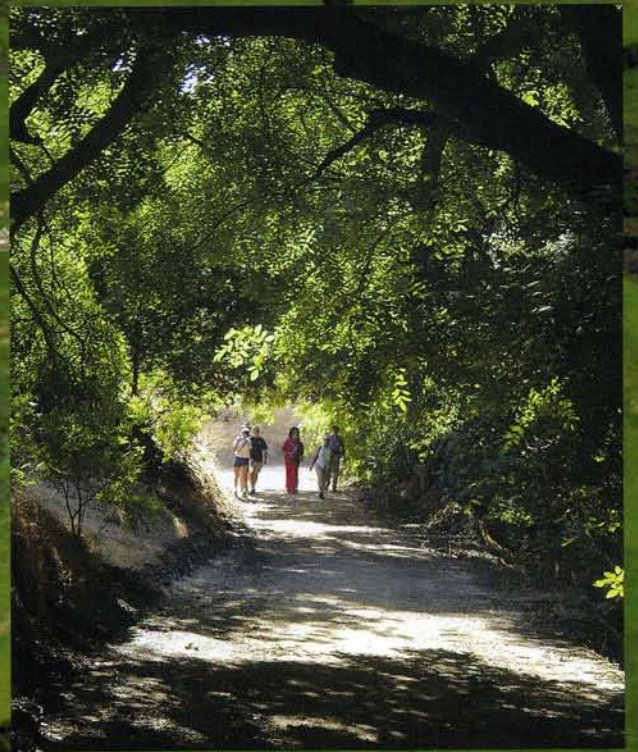
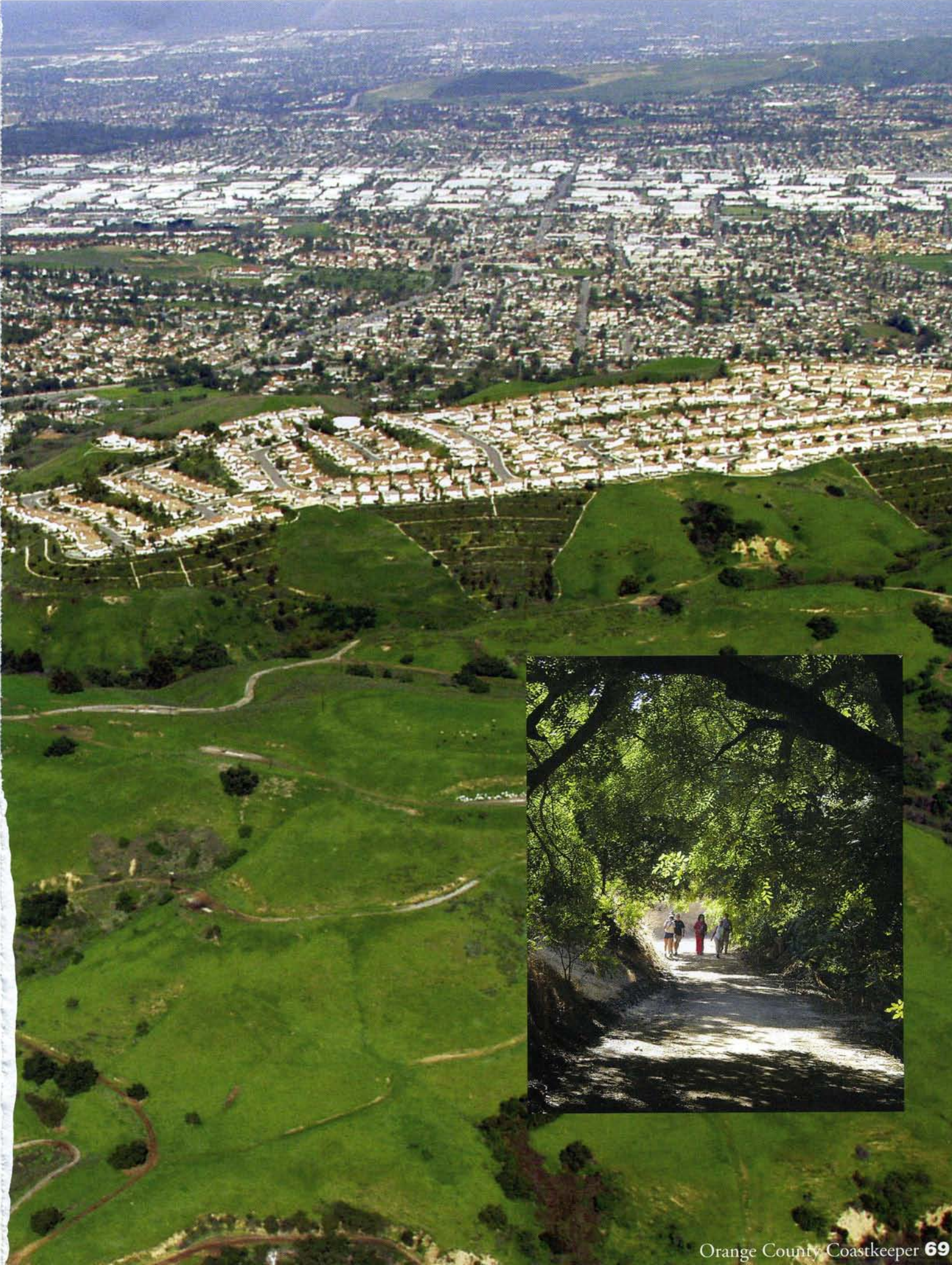
streams. Highways provide access to humans with illegal shooting and arson soon to follow. Finally, all of the above impacts act synergistically to create even greater destruction.

But threats to State Parks are not limited to roads (and high speed rail). In 1998, I assembled the first ever list of threats to all California State Parks. The list and variety has unfortunately grown every year and is now catalogued by the California State Parks Foundation. There is the “small” stuff such as encroachments of sheds, decks and fences onto State Park land, including the removal of a historically significant stone wall. Allowing dogs off-leash is becoming a state wide problem particularly on beaches. Though it may seem small to us, to the endangered birds whose nests are trounced, it is not small. With such perennial deep budget cuts, how can an over-



These hills may be paved over by Aera Development (the soft-sell name used by the actual development partnership of Shell and ExxonMobil).

Inset: One of the many trails families can enjoy in Orange County's open spaces.





When the rains come to the hillsides of Brea Canyon, the tans and browns of the dry season give way to verdant shades of green.

worked staff hope to keep up even with the small stuff?

San Diego Gas and Electric has proposed massive power lines through the fragile, hard to recover desert of Anza Borrego State Park. Keep in mind a road will need to underlie these towers, adding more physical insult than just the visual intrusion. The City of Chino Hills wants the State Park that bears its name (and enhances the property values of its residents) to absorb new transmission lines. Edison's preferred route follows a much shorter existing easement through a neighborhood, (where two council members live). The city has allocated \$650,000 in public money in an effort to shove the lines onto land we all own. Rather than explore the possibility of underground lines, removing the existing towers and sprucing the easement up as a greenbelt, the knee jerk reaction was "send it to the State Park."

Proposals for desalination plants abound up and down the coast, pollution from upstream runoff and ineffective erosion control also plague most state beaches.

However, the threat that ranks as my personal favorite is the proposal by the Bureau of Reclamation to take the selenium-laden, birth-defect causing contaminated residue from fertilizers at Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge and dump it off of Estero Bay near San Luis Obispo.

We have not been without victories as we try to fend off other proposed uses of protected, publicly funded State Park land. Despite the guise of trying to keep affordable housing at the El Morro portion of

Crystal Cove State Park, the trailers and mobile homes (mostly vacation homes) were finally removed. Restoration should begin soon, however, the two year delay by trailer park owners nearly doubled the price tag to the public. Under the ruse of "revenue generation" and/or "privatization,"

the historic cottages at Crystal Cove were almost bulldozed for a high rise hotel. Now wildly successful and popular as an affordable opportunity to enjoy the feel of a bygone era, the remaining unrestored cottages await further funding.

Were England's cathedrals supposed to generate revenue? Or were they supposed to generate reverence?

As we left England, we happened upon a charming town just outside of London and stopped to look at the picturesque, serene view of the surrounding countryside. We noticed in the yard or window of nearly every house in that village, a fluorescent green sign posted that read, "Save Whitfield Marsh." I know nothing about that marsh but I do know that someone in that little town loved that marsh, stepped forward and organized their neighbors on behalf of the land. That is

how parks are born.

It is increasingly apparent, however, that how they are "raised" is what will determine their fate. I hope that we can find it within ourselves to respect the past that saved our parks and to respect the future for whom the land was saved.

We can be thankful that those before us learned to value our natural and cultural heritage before it was too late. What will our children be thankful for?

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