

# The 'Wilderness Bill' pass

Toasting Congressman Sam Farr at the Los Laureles Lodge with Supervisors Calcano and Potter, and a group of activists. I thought back to the sunny Sunday in San Lorenzo Park over five years ago, when forest visionary Steve Chambers gathered a small group that would grow into the Ventana Wilderness Alliance. From this humble beginning, an organization was forged that networked with similar organizations throughout the state to study, survey, document, publicize and advocate for new wilderness acquisitions in California.

On Dec. 19, all our work was rewarded when President Bush signed the Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002. Congressman Farr's bill set aside approximately 55,000 acres adjoining the Silver Peak and the Ventana Wildernesses.

Wilderness acquisition isn't about turning farms or neighborhoods into wilderness. These areas were already National Forest or BLM controlled and already wild and roadless, necessary criteria for wilderness inclusion.

Our little group grew into an organization with members in several counties. We had a Web site ([www.ventanawild.org](http://www.ventanawild.org)), and we'd become involved in local issues: grazing allotments, archeological sites, trail maintenance and the California Wild Heritage Campaign.

One day, activist Gordon Johnson stretched out a map of the Northern Santa Lucias, and we identified areas that were potential wilderness additions. We chose favored parcels and made



Local Columnist

M.L. Fischer

plans to survey them. Late December, 1998, I climbed Coast Ridge Road from the Ventana Resort in Big Sur, a steep, dirt road used by the Forest Service and local land owners. It extends over 20 miles along the ridge. Four miles up is unspoiled Outlaw, wild land between the road and the Big Sur River. Terrace Creek Trail, the only trail through "Outlaw" descends from the Coast Ridge Road dropping two miles to the Pine Ridge Trail, just above the Big Sur River. This trail begins with hillside meadows with oak and madrone and drops into thick redwood groves with cascading waterfalls. I took photos and made notes.

Another larger parcel, called Logwood, is just up the Coast Ridge Road. It also extends down toward the Big Sur Gorge, following the Logwood Creek Canyon.

Easter eve 1999, I hiked up Boronda Ridge to the middle of Logwood, a few miles south of the Ventana Resort. Rain and wind almost ruined my plans, but the rain was stopping, so I took a chance, and in a few minutes the sun came out.

The ridge was covered in vivid green from the recent rains, and

along the trail were tiny violet flowers. The trail occasionally abandoned the exposed ridge for small stands of oaks and shelter from the wind.

I walked north, along the deserted Coast Ridge Road, looking toward Logwood Creek through a curtain of giant madrones. An abandoned road dropped toward the creek. I walked it to determine if it was impassable.

North to Outlaw, and it was time to turn south. As I walked towards Cold Springs Camp, Logwood's southern extreme, the wind through the trees was so loud I turned around often, expecting a truck on the road. The trees were bent, and I was concerned about falling branches. The deserted road and the howling of the wind gave a surreal quality to the five-mile walk.

Cold Springs Camp was too cold and windy for a lunch stop, so I refilled my water bottle from the tank and started back.

I spotted the trail, an old fire-break with a very steep trail bed of loose rock. Below that, the piles of leaves, now freshly wet from the rain, made the trail slippery. In spite of poor footing, the dark stillness of the woods was a welcome change from the exposed ridge. In the last two miles I experienced hail, rain and even snow. Then I was greeted by two dogs, who walked up as if they knew me and escorted me the rest of the way, to the highway, as if I'd been expected.

I transferred my data to the topographic map, labeled my photos and typed up my observations, and I felt I'd somehow paid my dues to

F  
ol  
de  
Sil  
reg  
Hov

At D

CON

Dec.

non (C

ley, S

boy, F

CAR

How