

# Investigating Manker Flat

Manker Flat, elevation 6,300' in San Antonio Canyon at the base of Thunder Mountain, is a fine example of what is termed the "montane coniferous forest" by ecologists. Nearby Big Butch Wash has a splendid array of rock types. Manker Flat is named for Fletcher H. Manker of Upland who, in the 1880s, built a storehouse to supply the Baldy miners. He ran a twice weekly pack train from Upland packing food, supplies and equipment for the gold mines. He is quoted as saying something like there was more money to be made supplying the miners than in gold mining itself at Baldy Notch.

**The History** The miners' pack trail ended at the head of San Antonio Canyon at Manker Flat in the shadow of Mt. Baldy.

Then in 1925 a dirt road was completed to Manker Flat replacing the pack trail. From there the USFS built a fire road up to Baldy Notch to connect to the old miners' road down to Lytle Creek. Now the upper canyon was accessible to automobiles and resorts and recreational pursuits began.

Snow Crest Lodge was founded 1925. Harwood Lodge was built in 1930 as a memorial to Aurelia S. Harwood, past president of the Sierra Club and Angeles Chapter leader. It is a large, rustic stone building with a meeting hall/dining room, kitchen, dormitories, and family bedrooms.



The Hogan, as it is known to locals, is the snack bar next to the campground. It is the original lodge that serviced the adjacent "Movie Slope." The name evolved from a Hollywood motion picture shot there in the 1940s. By 1952 there were four rope tows, a snack bar and ski rentals. Up the slope to the south are the ruins of the old rope tow engine.

The Mount Baldy Zen Center is a monastic style retreat center transformed from a Boy Scout camp acquired in 1971.

Manker Flat Campground cared for by the USFS is open from May to October with flush toilets and 21 sites for tents and RVs. It is a good location for an overnight stay to acclimatize oneself before a hike to Mt. Baldy. In the winter,

it is an excellent place to bring children to play in the snow. In the fall, the whole area is emblazoned by the golden leaves of the bigleaf maples that grow in abundance there.

**The Montane Forest** Conifer trees have a single trunk, evergreen leaves like needles or scales and cones. The name means "cone-bearing" but they also have an upside-down conical shape. This adaptation allows them to shed snow. Evergreen needles help conifers to utilize short growing seasons in our mountains. Cuticles around the leaves prevent water loss due to heat or cold or wind or ice.

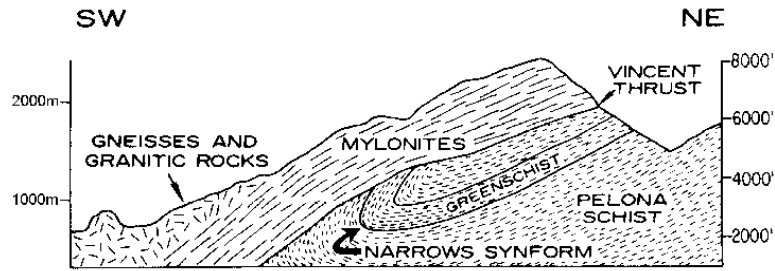
Most of the trees growing on Manker Flat itself are well-shaped and symmetrical with leaves growing all the way to the top.

But when you look at the trees growing on the slopes and ridges, the trees are irregularly shaped by the winter conditions.

Heavy snow can break or bend trees. Trees that are bent at the base, then heal and grow upright again have "snow knees". There are many of these on the north-facing slope.

Dead branches at the top of trees show damage by icy blasts, which injure tree tissue leading to dehydration and eventually death due to water loss.

Dehydration and abrasion also damage new foliage and create an awkward distribution of branches and foliage. Seen best on ridges, flagging is where the branches of the trees grow out one side of the tree. Piggyback is where the branches on the leeward side of the trunk grow erect.



Diagrammatic cross section near the Narrows of the East Fork of San Gabriel River (Jacobson, 1983)

**The Summer Resident Mountain Birds** Noisy ones with the blue bodies and crested black heads are Steller's Jays.

Black-and-white birds with red on their heads and loudly calling "yucca, yucca, yucca" are acorn woodpeckers.

Birds with pure white heads and all black bodies are white-headed woodpeckers. They search for insects and spiders on the trunks and limbs of living and dead trees, often starting at the bottom of a trunk, working up into the crown, then flying to the base of another tree. These woodpeckers pry off the scales of bark to expose their prey rather than drilling or excavating holes. The white-heads' skulls are less dense than other woodpeckers.

Brown birds with red heads and chests are finches. Males sing at the tops of trees. Brown bird with black or dark gray heads are Dark-eyed Juncos or "snowbirds" because they form large ground-foraging flocks in winter.

Western Bluebirds are blue with reddish chests. Only the males have color.

Small black, white and gray birds are White-breasted Nuthatches if they are spiraling down a tree trunk or Mountain Chickadees if they cling to undersides of branches or to tree trunks

Mountain chickadees have a black cap joining a black stripe behind distinctive white eyebrows.

To me the call of the Mountain Chickadee ... "Hellooo, sweetie!" also transcribed as "chick-a-dee-dee." ... is the sound of the mountains.

The call can vary in several ways when predators are near. Flying raptors, such as owls, hawks and falcons, provoke a soft, high-pitched "seet" call. The louder, signature "chick-a-dee"

call signals a stationary or perched predator nearby. Smaller raptors like the pygmy-owl and the American kestrel -- which are more maneuverable in flight, and thus better at hunting small birds -- provoke more "dees" at the end of a call, resulting in more chickadees mobbing together to defend themselves.

**The Vincent Thrust Fault and the Mylonite Black Belt** The Vincent thrust fault is the most significant feature exposed in the San Gabriel Mountains west of the San Andreas fault. The thrust is marked by a thick zone of mylonite that is overlain by gneisses and granites and underlain by the Pelona Schist. The Vincent thrust marks a major tectonic collision zone between an ancient continent and an adjacent ocean basin.

Mylonite is a fine-grained, compact rock without cleavage or crystals. It is classified as a metamorphic rock and has a flow texture. The foliated appearance and the presence of less deformed oval-shaped grains of quartz identify the rock as mylonite.

Greenschist is a general term applied to metamorphic or altered dark-colored volcanic rock. The green is due to abundant green chlorite, actinolite and epidote minerals that dominate the rock. To qualify for the name a rock must also show "schistosity" or some foliation or layering.

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