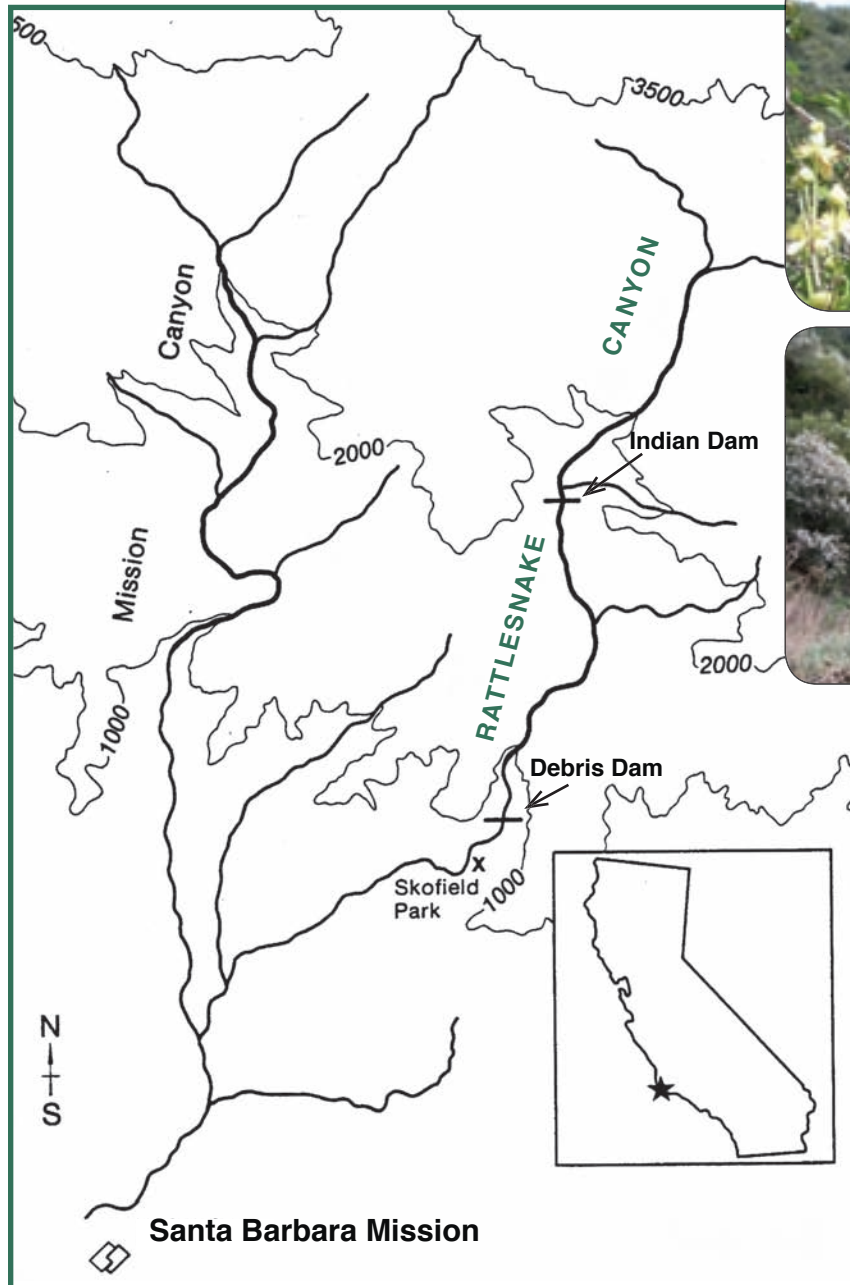


SECTION I. **EARTH**



Top: Chaparral clematis (*Clematis lasiantha*), a woody climber over the chaparral.

Bottom: Ceanothus and purple sage in late winter and early spring.

Left: Map showing Rattlesnake and Mission Creeks and tributaries. Courtesy of Scott Cooper.

1. ASPIRING TO BE A SAUNTERER

Cathy Rose is the Thoreau of Santa Barbara's Rattlesnake Canyon: an amateur botanist, a philosopher, and a prophet bearing warnings. She and I are hiking up the trail on an early June morning, a thin fog trapping cool air between the mountains ridges. Rose is petite and attractive, with salty gray hair and an outdoor enthusiast's permanent tan. Her step is sure-footed, but her voice has a quaver: it gives her words the sound of ancient wisdom. Rose approaches botany at Rattlesnake Canyon as she does any experience: simply to be alert and to notice the surroundings. "I don't start out by saying, 'I'm going to look at the rock-rose, then the chamise, then the big-leaf maple,'" she says. "Instead, it's a serendipitous experience in which musings on plants might be interrupted by the song of a bird or the flight of a butterfly."

The trail begins by the creek, in a riparian corridor of sycamore, alder, and willows. Within the first fifty feet it crosses the water, still flowing with a convincing gurgle at this time of year. On the other side a tall coast redwood tree looks out of place: an upright, coniferous sentinel amid the gnarly-trunked, prickly-leafed oaks. Its natural habitat ends south of Monterey, she comments, so it must have been planted here.

"Rattlesnake Canyon is a taking-off place," Rose says. "It's right on the edge of urban – not exactly wild but full of 'good nature' nonetheless. It's a Southern California scene with joggers in a hurry and people exercising with their dogs, and some saunterers such as geologists, birders, and plant enthusiasts."

We climb a steep incline around the redwood, through a forest of coast live oaks understoried by introduced rock-rose, *Cistus creticus* – a small-leafed shrub with quarter-sized pink flowers. We maneuver up and around several good-sized sandstone boulders

and feel the temperature rise with our ascent. Rose stops to point out the first small burgundy flowers of a bee plant, *Schrophularia californica*, being visited by bees. I smile at the big name for such tiny flowers.

At the top of the ridge we reach what is left of an old dirt road over which native toyon, mountain mahogany, scrub oak, and chamise keep the rock-rose in check. A few late stalks of blue-eyed-grass poke out onto the trail. Rose likes the wide trail because people can pass and greet each other, lingering without disturbing others.

"Thoreau talks about being a saunterer in a wonderful essay called, 'On Walking,'" she says. "He envisioned walking as sauntering, a word derived from Saint Terre, a saint of the land. He called true walkers 'holy landers.' Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, 'Earth's crammed with heaven/ And every common bush afire with God/ But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.' Thoreau was one of the ones who saw."

Her literary rendering of nature derives from a background in English literature at the University of California, Berkeley, followed by her discovery of botany at a Berkeley extension field course in 1963. After 28 years of teaching English in Pasadena and Santa Barbara, she retired to become a full-time "California buff."

This love affair brings her both the thrill of California's natural beauty and the sorrow of its despoiling. "The impurity of California is colossal," she says. Weeds encroach even in the desert, and it is only at the sub-alpine to alpine elevations or on special soils that the flora has not been altered appreciably by people's actions.

She stops by a large shrub abutting a rock-rose, fingering the leathery leaf. "Look at the native scrub