



Gary and Judith Ginder

How Ginder Gap Got Its Name

(This is the fourth in a series of profiles we're running on our Open Space founders. Foundation volunteer Karen Van der Veer talked to Gary Ginder to get his pioneer's perspective on the beginning of the Open Space.)

Open Space hikers from both the Marshall Drive gate and the Joaquin Ranch gate (off Rockspring Drive) often meet at Ginder Gap, the pass between two 750-foot Shell Ridge hills. It's named after Gary Ginder, one of our Foundation's founders. How did this scenic dip in the trail come to bear his name? He and his late wife, Judith, were early members of the group who helped bring the Walnut Creek Open Space into fruition.

Gary's involvement began at a well-attended Indian Valley School meeting in the early 1970s where he first learned about the bond issue planned to enable the purchase of open space

land in Walnut Creek. There were many meetings of this citizen-led effort to preserve open space. Audrey Bramhall (featured in our Fall, 2014 newsletter) chaired the Open Space Action Committee. "Audrey Bramhall was the general and I was a private," Ginder says.

In 1974, voters passed the Walnut Creek Open Space Bond, authorizing the City of Walnut Creek to acquire open space land. Ginder's most important involvement was at this point, when he was appointed to the five-person Advisory Committee to oversee the transfer of private land to the public domain. The committee's task: get as much open space land as they could for the \$6.75 million approved by voters and then facilitate the land transfer to the City of Walnut Creek. Of the Advisory Committee, Ginder says, "We listened to each other and we were good friends."

Ginder credits retired WWII Navy captain, the late Bob Pond, with forging optimal deals to procure key lands. Pond was a capable negotiator, well suited for the task, and worked with Ginder and others in several critical steps along the way. This included selecting the first Open Space ranger, Ron White. Although he was never a Foundation member himself since he was also a city employee, White, his wife Marnie, and its recently formed Board of Directors brought the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation to life.

Gary Ginder got involved because "...of this thing I feel in my gut about the land. This land belongs to the people and I was concerned that the government administer it properly."

So how did the Ginder Gap come to be? In a recent interview, Gary laughed and explained that it was late one night at yet another Advisory Committee meeting of these dedicated workers after the land had been purchased. They were discussing a seasonal pond around Borges Ranch when he said, "Hey, we've gotta name that pond, Bob Pond!" The committee thought that was brilliant and Bob was honored; nothing meant more to him than having that pond named after him. Pond got in the last word when he retired a few years later. To their surprise, both the Action and Advisory Committee members noticed that they had Shell Ridge Open Space features named after them, including Ginder Gap, a fitting legacy for this devoted steward of the Open Space.

—Karen Van der Veer



California Narrowleaf Milkweed: Monarchs Depend On It



An intricate dance by pollinators is necessary to propagate the milkweed. *Photo: David Ogden*

When you walk out into the Open Space this time of year most of the grasses are brown, many wildflower blooms have been replaced by developing seeds, or seeds have already dropped. But if you look in mostly sunny areas, you may find some green, three foot tall plants, with erect stems and distinctive, five inch long, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide pointed leaves. Their white to pink flower clusters and buds are whorled, or spiraled at the top of the plants.

These are Narrow Leaf Milkweeds, *Asclepias fascicularis*, native to the west coast, found from Washington and Idaho down through Oregon, California, Nevada, and into Baja California. The Narrow Leaf is one of 140 species of milkweeds, but it is one of only two that grow in the Bay Area, and the only milkweed species in our Open Space. Milkweed is critical to the survival of the Monarch butterfly. It's the only plant the Monarch butterfly caterpillar eats.

Milkweed gets its name from the milky sap in its leaves and stems. This latex sap contains alkaloids and complex chemicals that make the plant poisonous and distasteful to most animals, and give the monarch

caterpillars, when they eat it, protection from predators. The sap has been used by some Indian tribes for healing skin sores and cuts, and to remove warts. In contrast, the high sugar nectar of the milkweed flower is an important food source for many pollinators, butterflies, native bees, wasps, beetles, moths, true bugs, and hummingbirds. The milkweed plant is the center of a food web that includes 50 different species, eating each other and the milkweed. If you find a cluster of milkweed plants, look for the bright red and black milkweed beetles among the flowers. Then look more closely, and you can see other members of the milkweed food web, including aphids and ladybugs.

Unique pollen transfer feature

One of the unique features of *Asclepias fascicularis* is the way insects transfer pollen from plant to plant. In most flowers individual pollen grains are found at or near the top of the flower. In the milkweed the pollen is located in five vertical slits around the stigma. In these slits are tiny sacs, filled with pollen, called pollinia. When an insect visits the flower for nectar, its leg slips into the slits, a pollinia sac attaches to the leg, the insect then pulls the leg out with the sac on it. The sac twists 45 degrees, dries out, and by the time the insect moves to the next plant, the pollinia can fit into the slit on that milkweed flower, and be left there to fertilize it. Sometimes, if the insect is not large enough and cannot pull its leg out, it is trapped, and dies. Honeybees, and occasionally butterflies, can be victims of this pollen transfer system.

The seeds of the milkweed develop in "follicles", green bean like pods that swell and shorten as the seeds grow. The seeds are in neat overlapping rows, and develop white filament like hairs, called "coma", or milkweed "floss". As the follicles dry out and split open, the wind blows the floss and carries the seed away. You may see the seed being blown out of the follicles in a late summer breeze. The floss fibers

are hollow and coated with wax. In WW II the floss was collected and used in place of kapok in life vests. It is grown commercially now and used as a hyper allergenic filling in pillows and comforters, often mixed with down. In Canada a company is using milkweed floss to clean up oil spills. It repels water, and absorbs four times more oil than polypropylene, another absorbent.

Plant some at home

It's easy to incorporate these plants into your home garden. Milkweed tolerates a variety of soils, wet winters, and dry summers. It has a long taproot and a wide root system, so is very drought tolerant. It's useful for attracting birds and butterflies, and some beneficial insects. And it's beautiful.



Seeds attached to floss can catch a breeze and float away from mother plant, just one of the amazing features of this native. *Photo: Lesley Hunt*

Because of widespread spraying of the herbicide glyphosate, marketed as Roundup, and other habitat destruction, millions of acres of milkweed have already been lost in California alone. The Monarch habitat is shrinking and, alarmingly, the butterflies have decreased in numbers by 90% since the mid 1990's. Planting milkweed in home gardens is important for helping to sustain both milkweed and butterflies.

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Join Us For A Wildflower Walk

Part our Foundation’s mission is to increase awareness by local residents of our Walnut Creek Open Space and to help them enjoy the plants, animals and scenery that it contains. This spring we started a new series of walks in the Open Space to introduce people to wildflowers in bloom.

So far, we’ve held four walks. We saw fields of buttercups on the Fossil Hill loop in Shell Ridge and watched a colony of acorn woodpeckers just above our heads. In Acalanes Open Space, we enjoyed hillside peas, Chinese houses, Blue eyed grass and blue dicks. Along the Upper and Lower Buck Trails on the north side of Shell ridge, we viewed many yellow mariposa lilies, vivid orange wind poppies, and elegant clarkia. Ithuriel’s spears were everywhere on that walk. On an evening walk in Shell Ridge Open Space, we found soaproot flowers blooming. We also found beautiful blue foothill penstemon in the quarry near the Sutherland Drive entrance.



Foundation veep Bill Hunt, left, shows visitors blooming deer weed in Sutherland’s large quarry, part of an evening walk featuring soaproot in bloom. *Photo: David Ogden*

We often need to schedule our walks on short notice to fit the blooming of the flowers. When time allows, we announce walks in this newsletter. We list upcoming walks on the Foundation web site (wcosf.org), on our Facebook page, and we have started to send emails to Foundation members who have given us their email addresses. (If you have not given us your email address, please do so when you renew so that we can inform you of upcoming walks.)

To reach members and other local residents in a timely way, we started a group named “I Love WC Open Space” on the Meetup.org web site. So far, we have 197 people signed up to hear about our events. Joining the Meetup group is free; sign up and keep in touch.

We think that our walks have been a good way to get members and other residents out to enjoy our Open Space. We hope to add wildlife and scenery walks and to use the Meetup.org group to recruit new volunteers for our restoration projects.

—Bill and Lesley Hunt

(Milkweed, continued from page 2)

Look for our Narrow Leaf Milkweed when you walk in the Open Space this summer and fall. You can see it at Deer Lake, at the Sutherland entrance to Shell Ridge Open Space (in the quarry to the left of the gate), and many other places. It’s a beautiful, amazing, and important native plant.

—Linda Judd

(Sources: calflora.net, lasplittas.com, xerces.org; *Monarch and Milkweed*, Frost and Gore; National Resources Defense Council newsletters; phone interview with Joe Dahl, Tilden Regional Park Botanic Garden.)



Mayor Bob Simmons and Katrina Nagle.
Photo: David Nagle

Another Five Acres Preserved

The Foundation was pleased to help the City purchase five acres of land in Sugarloaf Open Space in May of this year. The land, a parcel contiguous to Sugarloaf and owned by East Bay Municipal Utility District, was the site of a planned retention pond which was never built. EBMUD offered the land to the City for \$40,000, and the Foundation contributed \$10,000 toward the purchase. Thanks to Foundation members for making this possible. In photo, Foundation President Katrina Nagle presents the check to Walnut Creek Mayor Bob Simmons.



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