

Rancho El Escorpion Lime Kiln Historic-Cultural Monument Application Presentation

This presentation will cover the following topics:

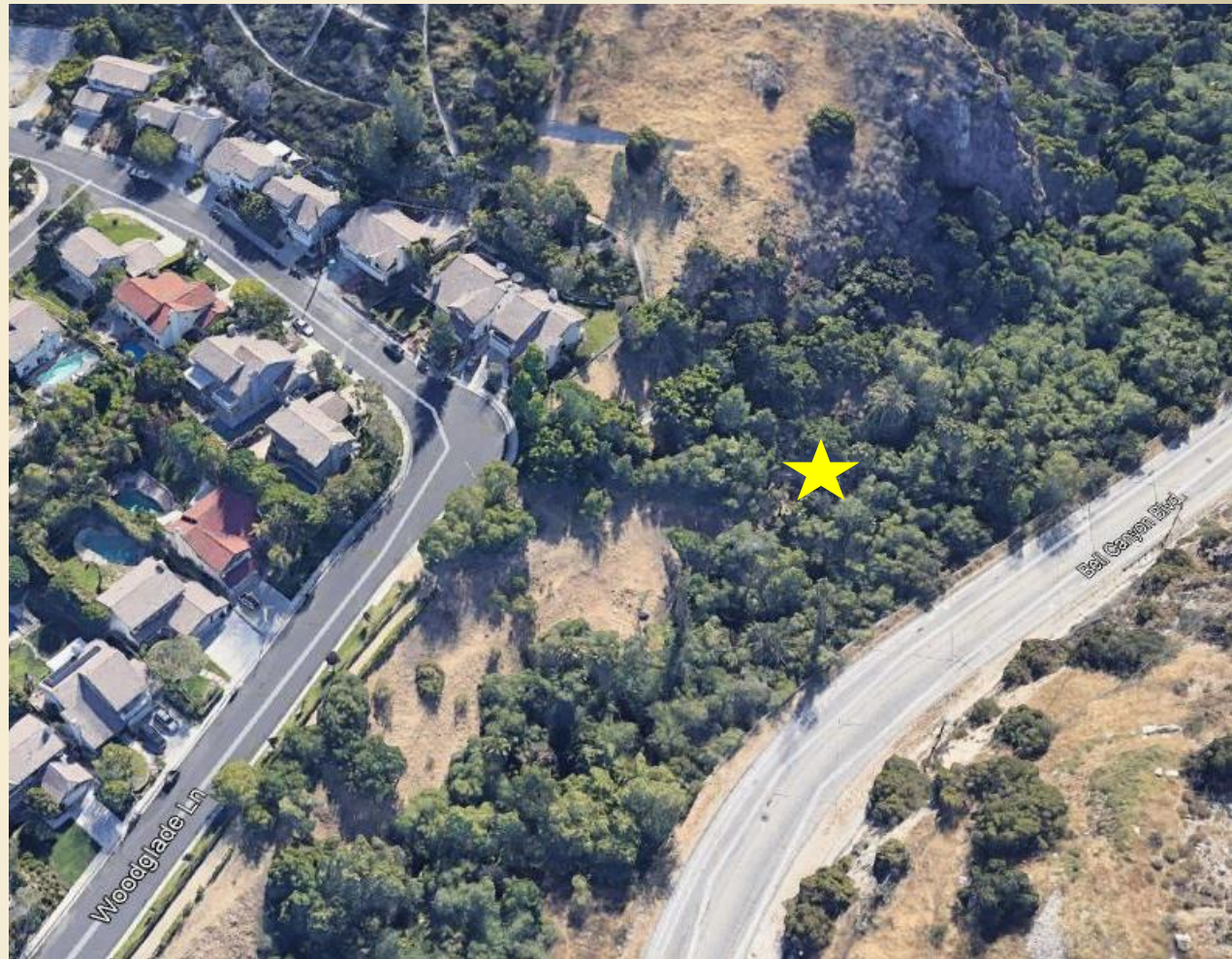
- Site Introduction
- An overview of West San Fernando Valley Lime Kiln sites
- Rancho El Escorpion / Bell Canyon History
- The Lime Kiln as it exists today

Statement of Significance

- The Rancho El Escorpion/Bell Canyon lime-kiln site is historically significant because it
 - Is the last visible evidence of the most important prehistoric Native American village in the west San Fernando Valley, dating to at least 3,000 BC, that
 - became a historically important Mexican land-grant and rancho,
 - which continued to be a center for the west San Fernando Valley Native American/mixed race community during the early 20th century.
- The Rancho El Escorpion kiln site is known to only a few people at this time; the general public is not aware of its existence. This even though the site is located in publicly accessible open-space, and is adjacent to a public hiking trail; the site is not marked or signed in any way. Establishing the Rancho El Escorpion kiln as a City of Los Angeles Historical-Cultural Monument will help ensure the protection of this important historic site.

Site Location

- The Kiln is located in a City Park, on the south side of Bell Canyon Creek, which is just south of Bell Canyon Blvd.
- There is a trailhead, for a walking path to the creek and kiln, on Woodglade Lane
- AIN: 2031009905



Eastern Simi Hills 1871 Map – Showing the West San Fernando Valley Limekiln Sites



- 1 La Calera at Woolsey Canyon
- 2 CA-LAN-247H at Dayton Canyon
- 3 Rancho El Escorpion kiln at Bell Canyon

Buildings at the San Fernando Mission

Quicklime had to be made available for the following structures:

- 1797 – First Church Building
- 1798 – Granary and weaving room
- 1799 – second Church Building and granary, and a dwelling for the padres
- 1801 – six houses for the guards, apartment for the single girls and women, more granaries and store rooms
- 1804 – 70 adobe houses for the neophytes
- 1806 – The new church is built
- 1808 – A dam built of masonry, and an aqueduct from the dam to the Mission
- 1810 – A new house for the fathers and a new village ranchería consisting of 40 houses.



Mission San Fernando Rey de España circa 1870

The Old West Valley Lime Industry – Limestone background

- Limestone is a sedimentary rock composed of the minerals calcite and aragonite (i.e. calcium carbonate), and is largely made of skeletal fragments of marine organisms including corals, diatoms, and shell materials from larger marine organisms.
- Limestones of various sorts make up about 10% of all of the sedimentary rocks on the earth, and they are found in almost all parts of the world.
- Geologically, Chatsworth, as a part of the Pacific plate, was once 5,000 feet below sea level. As the Pacific plate collided with the North American plate at what is today's San Andreas fault, the Pacific Plate rose to today's 1,000 feet above sea level.
- A seam of limestone runs from Bell Canyon to the Woolsey Canyon area. The richest limestone is in between the two sites in Dayton Canyon.

Chatsworth Limekiln

Pierre Domec and other Frenchmen operated limekilns at La Calera in the 1850s-60s. Lime had a ready market in Los Angeles, for plaster, mortar in brick construction, for the process of tanning cowhides, for sanitation, etc.

La Calera can be seen today looking east from the intersection of Woolsey Canyon Road and Valley Circle Blvd.



2014 photo of the limekiln, known as La Calera at El Escorpion de las Salinas, in Chatsworth Reservoir. Designated in 1975 as *L.A. Historic Cultural Monument 141*

Limekilns and how they work



Chatsworth Reservoir limekiln (La Calera)
View of back wall, which is all that remains. This kiln is built with hand-hewn sandstone blocks and is over four feet thick; it is at least 18 feet deep



Access arch of the Bell Canyon limekiln
1987 photo courtesy Leonis Adobe
The bricks in the access arch are not adobe bricks, but fired bricks from the 1850s-60s American Period.

Examples of Vitrified Rock and Oxidation at Bell Canyon and Woolsey Canyon Limekilns

- Vitrified Rock: Heat over 1,800° F causes rocks to melt and fuse together
- Oxidation: Iron Oxides in sand and stone turn red as the result of extreme heat.



Bell Canyon



Woolsey Canyon

Lime Kiln Plaque at Orcutt Park

Ancient Live Oaks And Old Mission Lime
Kilns 1797-1806

These venerable oak trees were topped by
the Franciscan Friars to furnish fuel for the
nearby lime kilns that provided mortar for the
building of the

Mission San Fernando Rey De Espana

These fused rocks were taken for their
preservation from the remains of the ancient
kilns in this vicinity

Dedicated in honor of
William W. Orcutt
October 2, 1948

Historical Society of Southern California and
California Centennials Commission



Miguel Leonis and Espiritu

- Miguel Leonis, a 35-year old French Basque, became a resident of Rancho El Escorpion (later called Bell Canyon) in 1859. Leonis raised sheep, and he was one of many French and French Basques who came to California in the 1850s to work in that occupation. The three owners of Rancho El Escorpion allowed Leonis to use their land for his stock.
- In 1859 he married Espiritu, Odón Chihuya's third daughter; Odon was the principal Chumash grantee of Rancho El Escorpion.
- Leonis built several adobe houses on the north side of Bell Canyon Creek. His countrymen from France occupied those houses when they worked the limestone quarries.
- By the 1870's the Leonis home was the Leonis Adobe in Calabasas.



Espiritu Chihuya



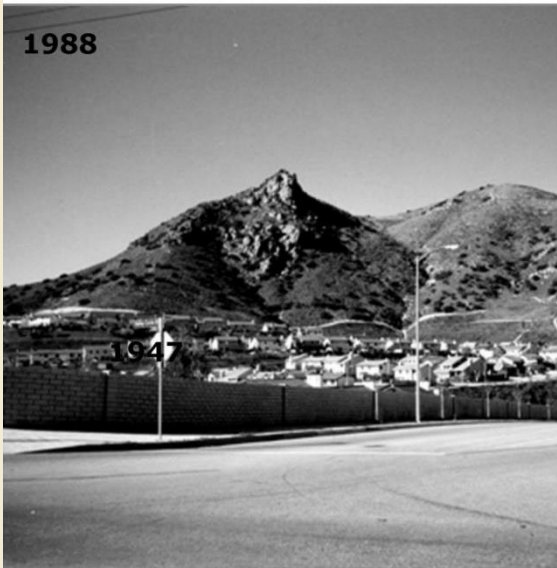
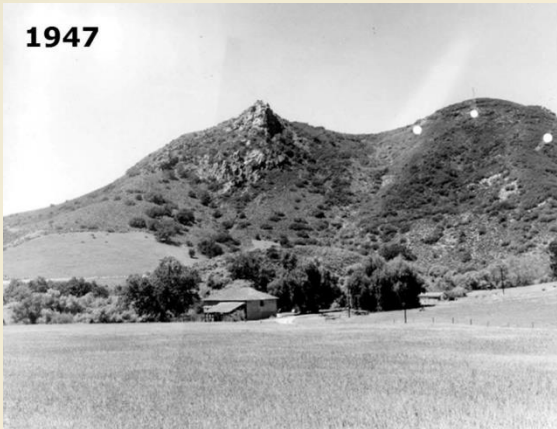
Miguel Leonis

**A 1936 photo of
an adobe house
on Bell Ranch**



Old Bell Canyon Photos

1936 Barn
1947 Ranch
1988 New
residential
housing



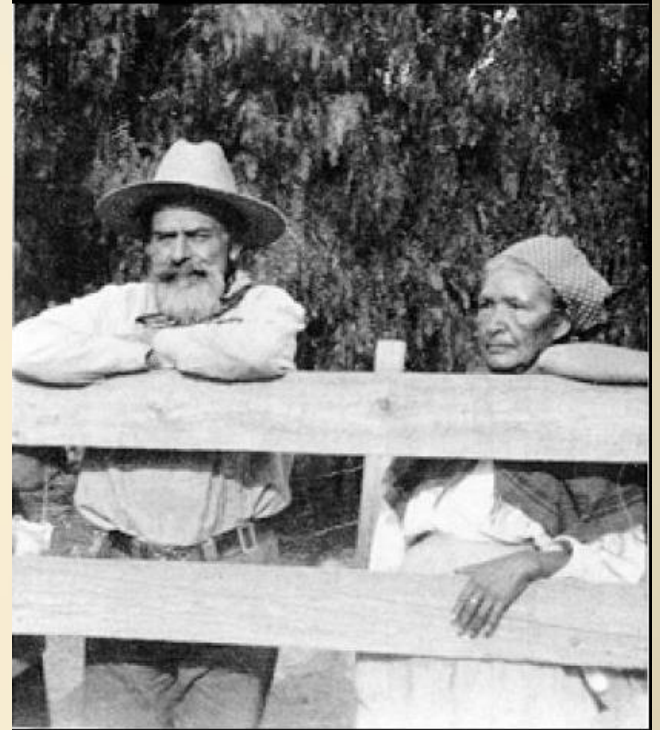
1936 photos from
the Library of
Congress Historic
American
Buildings Survey
at Rancho El
Escorpion

**Rancho
El Escorpion
Lime Kiln
at Bell Canyon
today (2017)**



John P. Harrington's visit 100 years ago

- In 1917 John P. Harrington visited the area and interviewed Espiritu's son Juan Menéndez (1857-1923), and his wife Juana, at Rancho El Escorpion.
- Notes from Harrington, related to La Calera, include -
 - "Lime pits of the Mission were there" (106-117:9:3)
 - "Lime from La Calera was used in Los Angeles even after the Santa Cruz lime began to be brought in" (106-117:9:5)
 - "Finally the Tehachapi lime was granted such low rates by the railroads that all competition was precluded" (106-117:9:6)



Juan and Juana Menéndez, Calabasas, 1917
*JP Harrington Collection, Santa Barbara
Museum of Natural History*

**1947 Ruins of
Rancho
El Escorpion
Adobe- Note
quarry face
behind the
adobe**



“The Final Chapter” on West Valley Quarrying Activities- Bell Canyon Limestone Quarry

In 1939 to 1941, the limestone hilltop at the mouth of Bell Canyon was used to make plaster to face Sepulveda Dam.

