

The Californios used the Spanish word *chaparro*, meaning scrub oak, to describe the community of shrubs that often grows on the local hills. It is shaped by our Mediterranean climate, with its mild, wet winters and its hot, dry summers. Chaparral plants, usually no higher than 10 feet, have adapted to hot, steep, rocky areas where the rainfall runs off quickly. An estimated five percent of California is covered by chaparral. The Black Hills, north of Livermore, were named for their chaparral, which looks black in the summer and autumn in contrast to the golden grasses.

Smaller varieties of chaparral plants sometimes have leaves with fragrant oils smelling like turpentine, vinegar, or mint to ward off browsing animals: most people react to the oil of poison oak. On hot days the plant oils evaporate, thus cooling the leaves. Some chaparral plants, like poison oak, are deciduous, but most are evergreen. The chaparral biome carefully preserves against water evaporation: manzanita's stiff leaves turn sideways to avoid direct sunlight; chamise has developed needlelike leaves, which provide less surface for the sun's rays.

When an arson-ignited blaze broke out on 14 July 1981 and burned 2,400 acres from Blackhawk Ridge to Finley Road to Curry Canyon, it raged for three days until it was contained. Burning chaparral sent up huge columns of flame fanned by erratic winds in areas too steep for fire engines to maneuver. The main attacks had to come on foot and by air.

One authority from the California Division of Forestry said appreciatively of the assembled firefighters, "It's a direct attack. Hot, smoky and dirty, with hand tools. It's the only way to do it, and they're doing a tremendous job." Roger Lake told of local volunteers being caught in the middle of an aerial drop of bentonite: "We were up on a ridge. We were getting 40- or 50-foot columns of flame coming up through the chaparral. There were air drops on us, behind us, in front of us, to keep sparks away." A firefighter who had been bulldozing hillsides for a day and night had a face smudged with dirt, and his bright yellow fire retardant clothes were a dull gray. He commented to a reporter, "You get used to it. But it does get a little hard when the dozer starts going

## Do You Remember?

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### CHAPARRAL



John McGlinchey in his "woolies."

leather guards now called "chaps." I am from back East, where we pronounce the word "chaps" as if it begins with the "ch" of the word "chin." Here in the West, however, the common pronunciation has the word beginning with the "sh" of "she." That is because both chaparral and *chaparajos* begin with the soft "sh" sound of Spanish. Chaps fit over the rider's pants with a separate belt. Sometimes the leather has the animal hair or wool left on, offering even more protection. Kathryn Laughlin remembers her grandfather, John McGlinchey, had chaps made of angora goat skin with the wool left on the outside. Kathryn calls them "woolies."

The natural oils in the animal hair helped to shed rain water and kept the rider warm in the winter. With the development of the rodeo as an entertainment, the design of chaps became not only functional, but decorative. The fringe, which had little importance originally, became an integral part of rodeo chaps because it exaggerates the motion of the bucking animal and dramatizes the cowboy's ride.

The overarching shrubs of chaparral conceal the

hummingbirds, towhees, and scrub jays. The trail curves from woodland into chaparral habitat and back. Red-barked manzanitas are common as well as wild lilac and chamise. In an 1861-62 survey of the area, maps and notes showed places called "*chamisal*," a now rarely used word for the almost impenetrable thickets formed by chamise.

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### Still Space for Vendors

The upcoming 2012 Children's Fair, put on by the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District, still has space available for vendors interested in connecting with community families.

This year's fair is set for Saturday, Sept. 15, and Sunday, Sept. 16, at the Robert Livermore Community Center, 4444 East Ave., Livermore. The fair will include performances, safety information, entertainment, crafts, carnival games, food booths, "Make It and Take It" crafts and more. The objectives of Children's Fair are education, safety, recreation and fun.

Nearly 2,000 people attend this free fair each year, making this a great opportunity to spread the word about local businesses. Vendor

Ceanothus—wild lilac or buck brush—protects its leaves with a waxy substance. Another familiar plant in the chaparral is toyon, sometimes called California holly, with its bright orange-red berries in late summer.

The natural oils and waxes of these plants cause them to be highly flammable. Fire is essential for chaparral to renew

sideways.”

One evening, 32 hours into the battle, local firefighters were stationed on the west side of Finley Road with instructions to protect nearby houses from the approaching fire. The winds came up again after dark, gusting up to 25 miles an hour, and sent flames scurrying into more brush. As chaparral that had been

holding back the rocks on the hillside burned, rocks tumbled down the hill toward the firefighters. They could hear and feel them whistling past in the dark. One hit a fire engine and put it out of commission. Although the flames came close, no structures were lost, and no one died. Almost 1,000

firefighters from all over the state fought the blaze. In the natural world of the chaparral, fire is good. Sprouts rise from old root crowns, and the heat of the fire germinates seeds.

To protect their legs from the dense thickets and from rainy weather when chasing cattle or horses, vaqueros wore *chaparajos*,

of chaparral conceal the tracks of many residents, including skunks, bobcats, deer, feral pigs, coyotes, rabbits, snakes, and lizards. In bygone days grizzly bears often retreated from hunters into these warrens. One of my favorite places to visit chaparral is in Morgan Territory Regional Preserve on the loop of the Prairie Falcon Trail. You won't see any grizzlies, but you might see

local businesses. Vendor spots are available in the areas of food, commercial and nonprofit information for children and families. The deadline for vendors is Friday, Aug. 24, or sooner if spots fill up. Booths are 10-by-10-feet, with shade.

The Children's Fair runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days. Interested vendors can contact Moe Kline at 925-373-5717 or [mkline@larpd.dst.ca.us](mailto:mkline@larpd.dst.ca.us). F