

NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA WITH SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY

The White Mountain Rose

By JOHN M. McDANIEL
Sierra Foothill Conservancy docent

It had been called the White Mountain Rose, so named by Clarissa Kneeland who once lived in one of the few places on earth where this plant is found: on Black Mountain near Prather.

A White Mountain Rose grew just outside the home she and her brother, Ira, built on that mountain. Perhaps the title she bestowed best captures the magic of this rare and once elusive shrub. It is, as Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Diana Marcum observed, a “potent force of nature.”

We are speaking botanically of the evergreen bush known as *Carpenteria californica*, sometimes called



Carpenteria alongside the “Four Lane,” May 6, 2020.

the bush anemone or tree anemone. The mock orange may be its closest relative in the *hydrangea* family.

Carpenteria grows naturally between six to ten feet

in height and as broadly as ten feet. It is known for its aromatic, crinkly anemone-shaped white petals that encircle dozens of bright yellow stamens. It blooms between May and July.

The plant was discovered by John C. Fremont—famous explorer, California senator, and unsuccessful 1856 Republican presidential candidate. Perhaps preoccupied with the emerging conflict with Mexico in 1845, “The Pathfinder” mistook the location of his discovery, which resulted in *Carpenteria*’s disappearance from the annals of botanical science for thirty years.

Fremont did, however, succeed in christening the plant in honor of William M. Carpenter, a noted botanist.

Fortunately, in 1875 the Swedish botanist Gustav Eisen again located the elusive shrub, this time on Dry Creek, about a mile or so above Tollhouse. His find was no small achievement, as this species grows exclusively at an elevation between 1500 and 4000 feet and in an area encompassing 240 square miles between the San Joaquin River and the Big Creek tributary of the Kings River.

It is most heavily concentrated in the Sierra foothills on Black Mountain and along Highway 168’s “4-Lane” section at Big Sandy Bluff. Natively, it grows nowhere else.

Next week: *Carpenteria* becomes a botanical celebrity at the Kew Royal Botanical Gardens.

Fire

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that no flying embers landed in the grass. As soon as PG&E arrived and turned off the power, firefighters got to work pulling the structure apart and hosing it down in an effort to put the fire out.

The incident commander sized up the situation, made the decision to cancel much of the responding equipment and hand crews, and handled the blaze with personnel from Blasingame, Hurley and Auberry Fire. The mop-up probably would take most of the night and an engine crew would remain at the scene to monitor it after the fire was deemed out.

Fire investigator Rick Moore, after an examination of the scene, came to the conclusion that the fire was started by a washer or dryer that was located in the home. But if the home was vacant, who was using the machines?

After making contact with the homeowner, who lives out of state, Moore learned that the washer and dryer were very old and that the wiring leading to the machines was also very old, having been in place since 1970 when the mobile was placed on the property. People living around the home would use the machines as needed.

After further inspection, Moore called the fire “accidental” due to the old wiring.



Becky Mendoza brought a box of books for Talya Zhaga to choose from.



Paul Petty and Becky Mendoza enjoy connecting with students and families along the Upper Burrough Valley Route. McMEEN PHOTOS

Books Bring Smiles

By KAREN CHENEY
Mountain Press contributing writer

Since the implementation of distance learning took place in March, Sierra Unified School District staff have prepared and delivered loads of lunches with a side of continuity and connection during this unusual school year. Becky Mendoza, an aide at Foothill Elementary School, and bus driver Paul Petty manage the Upper Burrough Valley Route for lunch delivery. The pair have been greeted warmly by students and parents alike.

During the course of conversations with parents, Mendoza wanted to know if there was anything that the families needed to make learning and life at home a bit easier. The resounding response from parents was their children’s need for BOOKS! So Mendoza, with the support of others, quickly set out to create a mobile library of sorts.

An email was sent to staff at SUSD asking for book donations. Word spread to the community and, within less than a month, Mendoza accumulated approximately two thousand books for SUSD student readers. According to Mendoza, there is great flexibility in this library system: students may keep, or bring back books for exchange.

Once a week, Petty and Mendoza would arrive with boxes of books along with

bags of lunches. Often, students requested specific types of reading material; Mendoza noted that Princess and Lego books have been particularly popular among elementary school students.

Mendoza said that the reaction of students receiving books “makes our day,” and she shared this heartening example: “A 4-year-old boy was so excited about getting his Lego Batman book that he dropped his lunch and began telling his family about it.”

Due to concerns about COVID-19 transmission, Mendoza’s book preparation routine includes disinfecting and placing books in a large trailer where they are exposed to the sun. Recently, while retrieving some books, she encountered some library patrons that were not on the delivery list—a couple of Mendoza’s goats, hungry for knowledge, helped themselves to a few books. Changes were made before the animals had the opportunity to check more books out.

Mendoza reports that she has a solid inventory of books for elementary and junior high school readers, but is in need of books for high school students. The lunch/book delivery schedule will end on Friday, June 5, but Mendoza will make arrangements to continue with book deliveries and take donations at a central location. For more information, contact her by text message only at (559) 355-1191.



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