

Shape the Future Canyon Chatter

Friends of Madera Canyon

December 2024



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From the President

If The Friends of Madera Canyon Never Existed

This time of year, “It’s A Wonderful Life,” a 1940s film starring Jimmy Stewart, will be televised as happens most years. The movie provokes thinking.

George Bailey is a kind man, doing things for others is second nature. A series of misfortunes befall George, leading him one Christmas Eve to the point of standing on a bridge above a rushing river, regretting that he had ever lived, and intent on jumping in to end his misery. George jumps, but Clarence Oddbody, recently deceased, jumps in to save him.



Photo:
© Life Mag.

Clarence then leads George on an Ebenezer Scrooge-like excursion to show George what would have happened in their town if George had, indeed, never existed. The name of the town would not be Bedford Falls, but Pottersville, named for the sleazy banker whose venality knew no end. The man George had stopped from accidentally poisoning a customer had been jailed for manslaughter. The city park became a cemetery without George around to advocate for the park.

George’s uncle, well-meaning but befuddled, had been put in a mental hospital because George had not been around to look after him. George’s younger brother, saved as a child from drowning by George, had drowned. As a result, the troops the brother had managed to save in the war were all killed.

You get the picture.

Whenever you or I are asked to join an organization or give the gift of time, talent or resource, we seldom wonder what would happen if that organization didn't exist. We choose to join or give according to whatever we believe in or judge worthy of our support, never worried that the organization's existence depends solely upon us. In fact, it seldom does.

But, what if everyone of us members of the Friends chose not to be members or give of ourselves to the mission? Or what if there had been no women and men in 1987 interested in forming a group of volunteers to partner with the Forest Service in enhancing the experience of visitors to Madera Canyon or advocating for its preservation?

There are not many places in the Canyon where some impact of the Friends on the physical infrastructure since 1987 is far away. Who would greet visitors to the Canyon on weekends and provide information about its allures? Who would ensure that the picnic areas are clean? Who would be looking after the condition and safety of trails in the Lower Canyon? Who would be educating the community, from 3rd graders to La Posada in age, about the wonders of the Canyon?



Photo:
Jim Burkstrand

Maybe some other groups, some other people, hopefully not a group of Mr. Potters. But there are no guarantees.

Judy and I have chosen to be members, to donate what we can, and to volunteer in the activities of the Friends because we believe in the importance of Shaping the Future of Madera Canyon, to ensure that people who come after us have the blessing of nature that the Canyon represents that we now enjoy. No doubt, we are little different from those in 1987 who formed the Friends.

George Benson mattered to Bedford Falls, its citizens and his family. Our predecessors in the Friends since 1987 have mattered in the life of Madera Canyon. We have inherited responsibility from them to be good stewards of both the Canyon and the Friends.

I can't imagine the Friends of Madera Canyon not existing. Can you?

Dan White, President, FoMC

The Honor Wall

As you begin to walk the paved portion of the Proctor Accessible Trail, on your right is the Honor Wall. The words on the introductory panel read: “This Honor Wall celebrates the Friends of Madera Canyon (est. 1987) and their partnership with the Coronado National Forest. We honor the work and dedication of these volunteers, and we honor those who have been memorialized by relatives because of their love for this special place.” The Honor Wall was dedicated in 2015.



The Wall exists because key members of the FoMC Board of Directors, led by then-President Tom Purdon and soon-to-be-President Jim Woodward, envisioned a way “to recognize and memorialize significant volunteer contributions to our organization and the work we do” with more than a letter, pin, or certificate of appreciation. The U.S. Forest Service Forest Supervisor for the Coronado National Forest, Kerwin Dewberry, and the Recreation Officer for Madera Canyon, John Titre, lent valuable support in garnering USFS approval for the Wall.

Likewise, the creators of the Wall recognized that a memorial wall would offer families an opportunity to have their departed loved ones, who had a long-standing and meaningful relationship with Madera Canyon, be remembered in a public way.

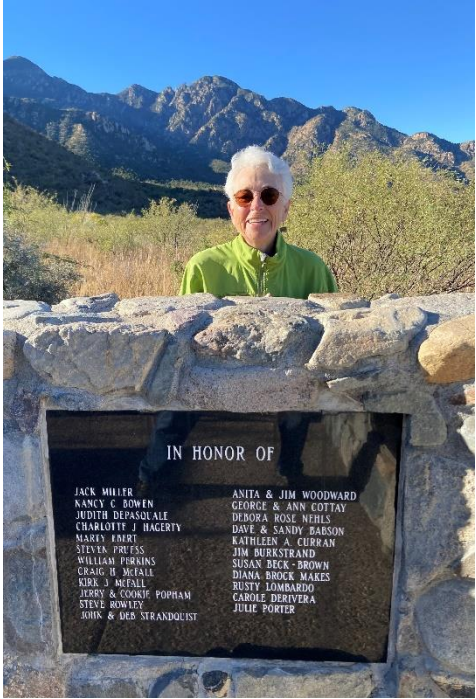
A special FoMC committee makes decisions periodically regarding the placement of names on the Wall. In the case of the Honor Wall, specific criteria apply; length of service to the Canyon for ten years or more and involvement in more than one avenue of service.

Nominations are made by people who have been responsible for the various committees and service opportunities

For inclusion on the In Memory Of Wall, families submit a written statement about the ways in which Madera Canyon had significant meaning over time to the life of the person being remembered. Often, these tributes are, in themselves, moving tributes to the impact the Canyon can have on people in many and varied ways. There is a fee attached to the addition of a name to the memory wall.

Jim Burkstrand, Susan Beck-Brown, Diana Brock-Makes, James (Rusty) Lombardo, and Carole de Rivera were honored in 2023. One name was added to the Honor Wall in 2024: Julie Porter.

Four names were added to the In Memory Of Wall in 2024—Doug and Marcia Jurgens, George and Joyce Williams, Joan and Doug Working, and Myron and Allie Sailer. Were you to read the statement submitted by the families of these men and women, you would be reminded of the power of Madera Canyon to provide inspiration and sanctuary to those who seek them. Statements are available for reading at the Annual Meeting or by request.



Julie Porter



All of the inscriptions were expertly done by Mark Sowers of Sowers Memorials in Tucson.

When I pass the Wall, as I do frequently, I am reminded of the foresight and wisdom of the FoMC leaders of the past in ensuring that we recognize that we are part of an on-going legacy of commitment and service to a place worthy of our stewardship.

Announcements

Volunteer!

*Do you like being in the Canyon and telling others “where to go?”
Do you like talking about Madera Canyon?*

The Visitor Information Station (VIS) is staffed by our volunteers on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays for four hours each day. Our volunteers work in pairs for two-hour shifts, and while they can work the same time every month, the schedule is flexible enough to accommodate our busy lives.

Visitors ask questions about hiking, birding, picnicking, parking and sometimes other more unusual things. We have maps and brochures that we give out and help make the visitors feel welcome and comfortable in the Canyon. Our volunteers often say how much fun they have with this assignment, and let's face it, what could be better than being in the Canyon?!

If you are an FOMC member and this sounds interesting to you, please contact us at info@friendsofmaderacanyon.org for more information and we will be in touch with you.

Friends on the Go!

At various times of the year, Friends of Madera Canyon sets up booths at events where we can let people know about Madera Canyon and the Friends. These are opportunities for us to talk about what the Friends do to help to preserve and protect Madera Canyon and encourage more people to become members to support our activities as well as become volunteers. We always need volunteers to help to staff the booth and talk with attendees about their own experiences in Madera Canyon and what the Friends do.

In 2024, we exhibited at events such as the Tucson Festival of Books (March 15 & 16, 2025) which draws 130,000 attendees over one weekend on the UA campus. Over 300 authors participated on author panels and there were exhibitors from other non-profits, bookstores and all sorts of literacy related activities. For example, the Western National Parks Association has a large tent and stage area as does the with Tucson Audubon Society.

In the past, we have participated in such events as the Tucson Audubon Society Birding Festival in August, the University of Arizona Insect Festival on October 6, Sahuarita's Spooktacular, a family Halloween night on October 26, and most recently, the December 7-8 Fiesta at Tumacacori National Historical Park.

Coming in 2025 are the Tubac Festival of the Arts, February 5-9, the Hawk Watch in Tubac on March 15, and the 2025 Audubon Festival in August.

These are opportunities to use your stories about and passion for Madera Canyon to encourage others to join our work to Shape the Future of Madera Canyon.

Communications

Audubon Society Talks in Green Valley

In the November Canyon Chatter, we noted upcoming talks by staff of the Tucson Audubon Society at the GVR Center. These talks usually occur on the second Tuesday of the month at 11:00. Whether you are a veteran birder or a newcomer to the pastime, you are welcome to attend!



The Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Friends of Madera Canyon will be held in January. Look for an upcoming special announcement and make plans to attend.

FOMC in the Media

We are grateful to the Green Valley News for recent stories about the work of the Friends of Madera Canyon, helping to eradicate the Yellow Blue Stem Invasive Grass and to educate the public about the unintended consequences of confetti bombs in picnic areas.

Birding

Winter in Madera

It's winter now in Madera Canyon, as far as the birds are concerned. To be sure, except high in the mountains, winter in southern Arizona is less rigorous than in most of the rest of the continent – all the places human Snowbirds flock from every fall. But the seasonal changes in the Canyon that bring in and usher winter out affect the Canyon's birdlife profoundly.

People who don't much notice the birds (yes, there *are* such people) are apt to ask birders of their acquaintance, "Even I know the birds migrate; surely there aren't any around in the winter. What's with the binoculars at this season?"

We know, of course, that just as fall migration sends some birds to Mexico and points south, it brings other birds to southern Arizona from Canada, the Great Plains, and the Rockies to spend their winters here. Winter is actually one of the better seasons for birding in the Canyon, commonly far more comfortable than the depths of summer, and with a different mix of species than in spring and fall. Both early and late winter brings rarities to Madera.



White Breasted
Nuthatch

Photo by
Monte Hudson

What is it about the winter months that makes such a change in the birdlife? It's not the cold, *per se*; birds can deal with cold. Feathers are the Great Insulator. Rather, for many species it's a lack of food. Insectivores – warblers, vireos, the Canyon's many flycatchers, and more – tend to go south, since the cold does kill the bugs they eat – or drives surviving insects into hiding. Similarly with the birds that eat fresh fruit or depend on flowers -- orioles, hummingbirds, and some others. Food gets scarce for them come late fall. After all, why would plants flower in the winter without pollinators about to make it worthwhile?

Winter rain does bring green to Madera, especially along the Creek, but it's mostly grass that greens up, along with smaller forbs, which appreciate the water but don't venture to bloom or seed out in this season. True, the Canyon, blessed with so many evergreen trees, looks alive at all seasons, but deciduous trees have lost their leaves, and what chlorophyll is left in oak leaves and madrone, junipers and pines, hasn't a lot to do in the winter months.

That should remind us what winter really is: it's the retreat of the sun. Days are short and the angle of what sunlight there is is lower. These effects are magnified in Madera, which faces north, away from the winter sun. Life in the Canyon just gets less energy in these months, too little for many species to thrive on. Many invertebrates, along with annual plants, die off; the rest make more or less drastic adjustments to get through until spring. So, generally, do the birds. Some have evolved migration to and from places better supplied with energy and life in the winter; others change their diet with the season; few breed in the cold months – which takes extra energy.



Ruby-Crowned
Kinglet

Photo by
Monte Hudson

Winter Residents

So what birds are here in the winter? Low in the Canyon, it's the seedeaters, sparrows most of all. Nearly twenty species of sparrow are in Madera in the winter. They're a challenge to identify. They flit and hide, and they all look alike anyway. Most come to us from farther north. Many could endure northern cold, but northern snows cover the seeds they eat. Other birds that migrate here eat the berries left on the Canyon's trees, especially hackberries, juniper berries, and the bright red *Pyracantha* fruit. Here and there will be sumac and poison ivy berries, poisonous to us but passing through birds' systems so rapidly they do no harm. Winter fruit eaters include American Robins (some of which simply come lower in the mountains rather than moving south), Hermit Thrushes and Townsend's Solitaires, and the occasional Elegant Trogon that may stay in the lower Canyon at least part of a winter before escaping to Mexico.

I've said that Robins come downhill in the winter from the higher woods where they breed. Do others of the Canyon birds do that too? Indeed, quite a few seem to, including many of the woodpeckers and the smaller woods birds -- Nuthatches, House Wrens, Bridled Titmice, Brown Creepers. By January, the trails higher than the Wrightson Picnic Area seem almost empty of birds. Mixed in with these are some true migrants, Ruby-crowned Kinglets are the most common, and the occasional Townsend's Warbler. And there seem always to be a few Painted Redstarts to stay the winter down below. What do these insectivores find to eat? Bugs they can search out in bark crevices and leaf litter, and maybe even a few flying insects in sunnier places, for which they'll compete with the relatively few winter Flycatchers we see in the Canyon.



Bridled Titmouse

Photo by
Doug Moore

Winter Rarities

I mentioned that winter can bring rare species to Madera. Only sometimes, of course. Rarities aren't to be expected. And the rarities that appear come variously from Mexico, from the north, and from the east. Some fairly recent rare sightings follow, with the years last reported.

Mexican species: Crescent-chested Warbler (2008), White-throated Thrush (2019), Rufous-backed Robin (2022)

Northern strays: Clark's Nutcracker (2024), American Dipper (2024)

Eastern strays: Golden-winged Warbler (2007), Ovenbird (2023)

Next month, I'll start the new year with an account of all the rarities reported from Madera Canyon during 2024.

Bob Pitcher

Education

FoMC Fall 2024 Student “Nature Walk” Field Trips

The Friends of Madera Canyon student “Nature Walk” field trips kept our docent volunteers busy on the Proctor Nature Loop Trail Thursday mornings this fall! There were a total of 6 field trips from two schools- Continental Elementary and Calabasas K-8.

In October, Continental sent a total of 65 students to the canyon. Each of the three 4th grade classes with their teacher and parents participated in separate Thursday field trips. Individual class field trips means four smaller student groups and lots of close docent attention. As usual, the Continental students were fun, sharp, and ready to explore! The students saw lots of birds, lizards, and insects.



Photo by
Jean Martin



Photo by
Jim Burkstrand

We tried a new experiment in November- for the first time all 3rd graders participated in our program! One of our retired former 4th grade teachers from Mountain View Elementary has returned to the classroom to teach 3rd grade at Calabasas K-8 (both in Rio Rico). She contacted me to ask about field trips for their four 3rd grade classes and I said, “Why not!” .

On Thursdays in November before Thanksgiving, Calabasas K-8 sent 105 3rd graders to walk the trail and discover Madera Canyon- 3 field trips total, one for each class (with the 4th class divided amongst the others!). With 35 students per trip, we fielded 6 walk groups each week! The 3rd graders proved to be energetic and curious hikers; lots of fun on the trail, despite a tendency to get very hungry and ready for their picnic lunch near the end. Excellent fall color made for beautiful walks, with deer, birds, and late season insects keeping things lively.



Photo by
Jim Burkstrand

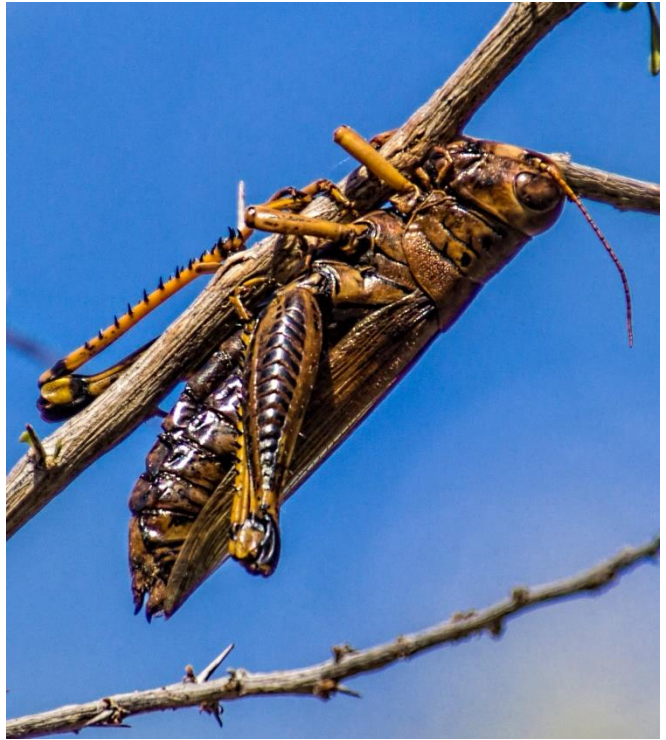


Photo by
Jim Burkstrand

I want to thank all of our dedicated FOMC Docent volunteers that continue to guide and facilitate local elementary students to experience the nature of Madera Canyon. Also, thank you to the teachers, assistants, and parents that participate and assist each field trip!

So- who is more fun? 3rd grade or 4th grade? We discovered that each grade brings their own special qualities of energy, fun, and curiosity. I believe the docents would agree that it is a toss-up and that we should continue our field trip “experiments” with Continental and Calabasas again next fall!

Doug Moore, Education Director

ON THE ROAD...to a new Visitor Center

Recently Bob Pitcher, Secretary, and Rusty Lombardo, President Emeritus made a road trip to Carr Canyon, specifically to Carr House, a Visitor Center manned by the Friends of the Huachuca Mountains (FoHM). It was at the suggestion of Adam Milnor, Recreation, Heritage and Lands Staff Officer for the Coronado National Forest. He asked President, White, to start giving thought to what a future Visitor Center might look like and that Carr House may be a good start. We met with President James Mustard, other Board members and Mike Foster, their Education Director. Carr House has a storied history. Built of native rock and stucco it was home to three families before being sold to the USFS. It had undergone a few additions while being used as employee housing and eventually fell into disrepair. In 1996 concerned local residents formed the FoHM and began its restoration. Today it houses an interpretive center and is open seasonally on weekends early Spring to late Fall and on Federal Holidays. We were very impressed with the usage of the building, displays, a meeting/presentation room, children's activity room and various continuous loop videos highlighting all things Carr Canyon.

Our takeaways were some great ideas that we reported to the Visitor Center Committee to prepare a white paper we will submit to the USFS early in 2025 and make available to FoMC members and the public. While we understand that it may be 5 years or more before the project is initiated, there may be a windfall that accelerates that process. FoMC feels that it is better that we begin the process now even though in time, it may need to be updated.



L>R Eric Anderson, Linda Stitt, Carolyn Santucci, Mike Foster, Geoff McLeod, Rusty, Lucky, Bob, James Mustard

So where do we start? First and foremost, would it be in conflict with our mission? While we do not advocate for expanded infrastructure, we understand that as Madera Canyon has grown in popularity (approximately 300,000 visitors annually) it would serve the public well to have a more comprehensive facility than that of the current Visitor Information Station (VIS). Forward looking, this could take many shapes. For some, a brick and mortar building might make sense. For younger generations, perhaps not so much. They may prefer using a phone, picking up one or several QR type codes to gather information, maps, brief videos that could be strategically placed throughout the Canyon. What would be the functions served? There are so many things to consider.

No spoiler alert prior to the release of our proposal to the USFS. That will be available soon and appear in a future edition of this publication. But before it does, how do you visualize a Visitor Center? What would you like to see? What should a Visitor Center do to enhance the Canyon experience. How might FoMC be involved in the operation of such a facility or facilities? Let us hear from you. Send your ideas to: info@friendsofmaderacanyon.org.

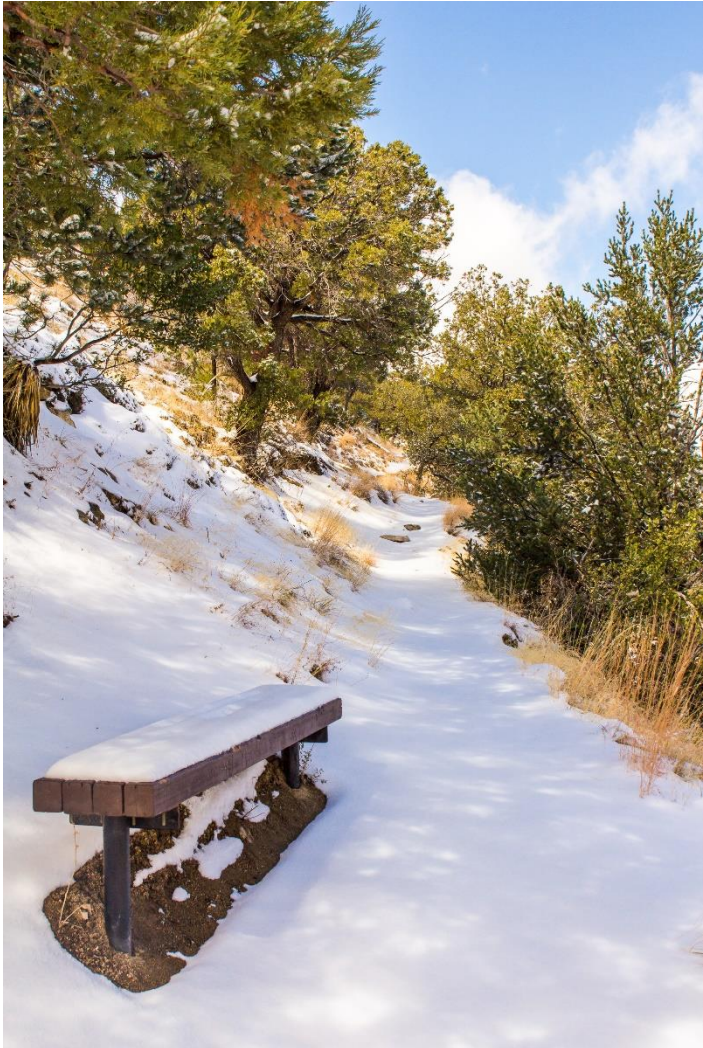
FoHM is a much smaller organization and wishes to grow and expand their presence. Unlike us, their coverage area is dispersed between several canyons and the main location, the National Monument. We shared with them our story, how it began and grew to what it is today. We visited with President Mustard and Mike Foster for almost 3 hours. We agreed to continue to stay in touch. President Mustard stated that he “looks forward to having a partnership with FoMC and believes we have a lot to offer each other.”

Rusty Lombardo



WRAP UP

The BOD of the Friends of Madera Canyon wish you and your family a very Happy and Healthy Holiday Season



If it snows, Madera Canyon can be a beautiful place to hike.

Be sure to come to the canyon in the winter and enjoy the natural beauty it has for us.

Photos by
Jim Burkstrand



John Murphy , the regular editor for the Chatter, has been temporarily incapacitated. As he recovers, Jim Burkstrand is editing this December Chatter. Jim has taken the opportunity to publish this in a more Smart Phone friendly format. You can send any comments to FOMC.Chatter@gmail.com

Visit Our Website

<https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/>

Send comments, articles, & announcements to:

Friends of Madera Canyon Chatter Editor

email: FOMC.Chatter@gmail.com

How to Join Friends of Madera : Visit our website .

<https://friendsofmaderacanyon.org/donate/>

The links will take you to a secure server to use a credit card or an automated payment. Do you have any questions? Let us know.

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