

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES



Mt. Rubidoux in Riverside, California. PROVIDED BY THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The towering history of Mt. Rubidoux near Riverside

Tracy Conrad
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Just west of Riverside stands a rocky peak protruding from the wide plain of the Jurupa Valley below. The mountain is crowned with a monument and large cross visible even to those whizzing by on the freeway. Before visitors from the rest of the country found the desert for a winter holiday destination, many went to Riverside and most made a trek up the boulder-strewn mountain, Mt. Rubidoux, to take in the panoramic view. Jurupa was an unusual name and is thought to derive from the Native Americans who populated the valley prior to the arrival of Juan Bautista De Anza on his travels through the area in 1774 and 1775. De Anza thought the area exceedingly pleasant and called it a paradise.

In 1838, the area became officially known as Rancho Jurupa under a land grant to Senor Don Juan Bandini by the Mexican government. In 1842 part of this grant was purchased by the future mayor of Los Angeles, Benjamin Davis Wilson.

Several decades later, the unusual name didn't suit the aspirations of a few resourceful locals looking to lure tourists. Named for the theoretical proximity to the Santa Ana River, Riverside became a city and the county seat, carved out of San Bernardino and San Diego counties in 1893. (Palm Springs and most of the Coachella Valley was part of San Diego County until then when it was placed in the newly formed Riverside County.)

The rocky mountain prominently protruding between Riverside and what remained of Jurupa was named for Louis Rubidoux, who in 1847, the year following the start of the war that would cede all of California from Mexico to the United States, purchased a portion of Rancho Jurupa from Wilson.

In 1906 Frank Miller, the owner of the Riverside Mission Inn, along with Henry Huntington and Charles Loring purchased Mt. Rubidoux with the idea of making it a tourist attraction.

The road and initial improvements were completed by 1907, with a tablet and the large cross placed at the summit honoring Father Junipero Serra, who rested at Rancho Rubidoux as he traveled on his way up the length of California. At the summit, a grand tower and a replica of a bridge in Alcantara, Spain were dedicated in 1925.

Huntington, one of the most wealthy and famous industrialists of the 19th century, is memorialized with a modest bronze plaque at the site that reads, "Man of Affairs.

Large in his Bounty Yet Wise. He feared God, Fostered art, and Furthered the Knowledge of Man. Like Huntington, visitors from all over climbed Mt. Rubidoux.



Early Palm Springs residents Harriet, Charles, and Joseph Henderson at Mt. Rubidoux in Riverside, California c. 1918.

One of the earliest visitors would leave a living legacy. In 1909, Jacob Riis, a friend of President Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Riverside at the Mission Inn and after a visit to the site, suggested holding an Easter sunrise service at the top of the mountain. It was the first such, non-denominational outdoor event of its kind in the country.

Celebrated annually thereafter, it drew huge crowds from all over the Southland including prominent citizens and newly minted Hollywood celebrities. Attendance in the 1920s was estimated at more than 30,000 people.

The popularity gave rise to similar gatherings in other locations including in Palm Springs, from the mountainside of the O'Donnell House, in Los Angeles, at the Hollywood Bowl, the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, and the Irvine Bowl in Laguna Beach.

In his 2021 book "They Climbed the Mountain," Glenn Wenzel documents the amazing list of those who visited Mt. Rubidoux.

John Muir, champion of the wild and the big trees in Northern California came in 1907 with his friend A.C. Vroman, a Pasadena photographer and owner of the eponymous bookstore that continues there today. (He also visited Palm Springs.) Muir noted, "The view is charming. I had never seen this country before and this was a delightful introduction. The view from the mountain is one of the most characteristic that could be obtained."

"Buffalo Bill" Cody arrived in Riverside in 1910 with his Wild West Show. In-

stead of riding horseback to the summit of Mt. Rubidoux, Cody was chauffeured in a gas-powered touring car. The trip went smoothly and "was made on the high without a stop" delighting the western stars. According to Wenzel, Cody declared that Riverside was a city "combining scenery and pleasant environment" and "is far in advance of any other place he has visited." (His cousin, Harriet Cody, would decide to settle instead in Palm Springs, founding a small hotel that persists today.)

Born into slavery, Booker T. Washington had been invited to dine at the White House by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901, the first African-American to grace the house. Washington briefly visited Riverside in 1914 in order to give several speeches, including an address in the Music Room of the Mission Inn on the founding of the Tuskegee Institute. Washington was escorted to the top of Mt. Rubidoux that day by Miller to enjoy the view.

William Charles Tanner, the architect of The Desert Inn in Palm Springs, was a regular visitor to the mountain, offering sketching classes for artists and socialites from the site.

Presidents Warren Harding and William Howard Taft also climbed the rocky height. Wenzel's book is a fascinating look at the many important personages who climbed Mt. Rubidoux and extremely worth the read.

But Wenzel notes, "so many more people have climbed the mountain in those years since Frank Miller built Huntington Drive as the road up and

down Mount Rubidoux. Many have climbed by foot making the ascent over either the road or by some of the foot paths. Others in the other years traveled by horse and buggy... (others) made the climb in their automobile."

Wenzel dedicates his last chapter in honor of "those countless people who have made the pilgrimage up the mountain. Many have climbed to view the panorama of the city of Riverside below. Many others have ascended to meditate below the cross at the summit. Thousands have gathered at that cross for the annual Easter Sunrise Services. Many have trudged up the mountain for exercise. And thousands upon thousands have recorded their visit in a photo."

The last chapter of the book features scores of photos of ordinary people at the top of Mt. Rubidoux. Many early Palm Springs residents made just such a journey and memorialized it with a photo. Wenzel writes, "If you have not yet done so, I strongly encourage you to climb the mountain. If you have made the climb, do so again and you can relive in your own mind some of these earlier encounters on the mountain."

Mt. Rubidoux was donated to Riverside by the heirs of Frank Miller in 1955. The park is open daily from dawn until dusk.

Tracy Conrad is president of the Palm Springs Historical Society. The Thanks for the Memories column appears Sundays in The Desert Sun. Write to her at psstracy@gmail.com.