

# THE UMINHUM TIMES

Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, San Jose, California

2 & 9 May 2015

## *Friends Encountered On the Trail*

Once this neonate rattlesnake recognized we had discovered his hiding place on the trail, he quickly moved off to find cover. A neonate is a rattler born alive last fall from an egg carried inside the mother snake. This one, who probably has between five and 25 brothers and sisters, had only two buds in his rattle, meaning it has molted only twice since birth. The first molt comes about a week after birth. This snake was the thickness of my little finger and about 12-15 inches long. Its diet at this age is insects and very young lizards. Only 20% of neonates survive to their second year; most are eaten by birds such as hawks or owls, wild pigs and other snake species.

# Friends Encountered on the Trail



**Maureen and Emily head up the trail as Quicksilver 100K runners pass in the other direction.**

Some walk, some run, some fly. Some bound and prance like the deer they are. Some slither.

The critters we've met in the last couple of weeks on our hikes in the Santa Cruz Mountains, just a few minutes from our house, have four legs, or two and occasionally none. In the fall the leg count can go as high as a big hairy eight during the mating season.

Emily and I have been stretching ours the last few weeks on the Woods Trail, which runs north from our usual hiking trails in Almaden Quicksilver County Park across the face of

Mount Umunhum (hummingbird in the Ohlone Indian language) in the Sierra Azul (blue mountains in Spanish) Open Space Preserve.

Yesterday we bit off about 11 miles of the trail with Maureen Chandler, a frequent hiking buddy. Mostly we encountered two-legged critters of the human variety.

In the hours we walked upward toward Mount El Sombroso (shady mountain), our turn-around point, we encountered a steady stream of runners headed in the opposite direction who

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## *Friends Encountered On the Trail*

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were competing in the Quicksilver 100K, a 62-mile trail run that began at 4:30 a.m., six hours before we started our hike.

For the slowest, the race would not end for 17 hours. But everyone who covered the distance in 16 hours or less qualified for the even more mind-boggling Western States 100-Mile Endurance Run, which is held every June.

The Western States begins at 6,300 feet in Squaw Valley near Lake Tahoe, climbs westward over the Sierra Nevada and ends 100.2 miles later in the foothill town of Auburn. The start of the Western States nearly always involves running through deep snow on the highest ridges. In 1995 the first 24 miles of the course were snow-covered and it was 107 degrees at the finish.

But if you finish in 24 hours or less, you get a silver belt buckle.

Back in our more benign coastal mountains we walked mostly under the shade of trees and hummingbirds looking for another flower to plunder.

Blacktail deer, like the two does that preceded us for a couple of miles on our May 2 hike, are among the most common wildlife we encounter in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In addition to rattlesnakes – small and large – we've also come across lizards, hawks, wild turkeys, bobcats, wild pigs and tarantulas.

We are still hoping to see – from a safe distance – our first mountain lion.

**Blacktail deer are common on our hiking trails.**



**The Woods Trail that we hiked the last two Saturdays begins where I'm standing at 1,400 feet and climbs to 3,000 feet at Mount El Sombroso at the top of this image. Because the trail follows the folds of Jacques Ridge, which is mostly out of site on the left, instead of the straight route of these power lines, the hike is about 5½ miles one way.**