For Ecological Study

Five Campus 'Nature Areas' Designated

Five locations of natural beauty and scientific interest on campus have been designated by Chancellor Roger Heyns as "natural areas" and will be incorporated as such into the long range campus development plan.

Three of these "undisturbed reservoirs" of wildlife and plant life are now part of the lower campus; the other two lie in the hills and canyons to the east. A total of 370 acres have been set aside.

"The Berkeley campus began with a truly magnificent site," says campus architect Louis de Monte, "and over the years, a great many people have done remarkable things to preserve the natural terrain and big open spaces. Only a few hundred feet from Sproul Plaza, a student can find a quiet spot by a brook shaded by trees where he can think, study or relax. The more I see of other campuses around the world," he added, "the more pleased I am to be here."

In recent years, however, the rapid expansion of campus buildings and roads has threatened the natural areas here.

Steps Taken

A report of the Landscape Architecture Advisory Subcommittee in 1966 stated, "Today we find the undeveloped lands on the Berkeley campus of the University, suitable as ecological study areas, considerably damaged but not hopelessly lost. Gone are the brush rabbits, coveys of quail, and tree frogs of the lower Campus. The delicate web of living things in Strawberry Canyon itself has been further disrupted. From the viewpoint of teaching and research in ecology we have lost ground. Much of value still remains, however, and we must now take steps to protect it."

In recommending setting aside 350 acres of campus property in Strawberry Canyon for teaching and research in ecology, the report noted, "Two factors argue in favor of (this preserve's) large size. (1) Many of the larger animals require considerable space to maintain populations at adequate levels for survival. A pair of red-tailed hawks may require a square mile, a pair of foxes even a larger area. (2) In view of the severe flooding that is threatening the (campus), it is essential that severe restrictions be imposed on further constructions and paving within the Strawberry Canyon watershed. Retention of the remaining lands in an undeveloped condition is the most economical way to prevent further aggravation of this serious problem."

Experimental Period

In December, 1967, the Campus Planning Committee recommended, and the Chancellor approved, the establishment of three "natural areas" and two "ecological study areas" on the campus. This approval was given for an 18 month experimental period only, subject to a number of conditions among which was the requirement that the Landscape Architecture Advisory Subcommittee submit a report on the usefulness of these areas.

During this time, some 5056 signatures were obtained on petitions and hundreds of supporting letters received from faculty, students, and people in the Berkeley community. This spring, the plan was finally approved by the Chancellor. Here are some of the findings in the report on what purposes Strawberry Canyon, the largest preserve, serves:

Some 4374 students use the canyon in their classwork for botany, biology, civil engineering, geology, entomology and forestry, to mention just a few departments.

Some 39 master's and doctoral theses have been based, at least in part, on these areas during their 18 month trial period, and 110 scientific publications. In mark, Switzerland and several American universities to study these natural areas.

Student zoologists go to the canyon to observe California quail and fence lizards; soil scientists examine the nitrogen-lupine, forestry students look for signs of deer damage. Geology students clamber over the cliffs to see volcanic rock outcroppings; seismologists study faults. Graduate students lie in the chaparral observing the behavior of brown towhees and competition among hummingbirds.

Parts of the south slope of the canyon come close to being an intact ecosystem with many of the organisms interacting as they did 100 years ago. It is possible to study over 100 species of wild birds, some 40 species of mammals and 12 species of lizards and snakes, including rattlesnakes.

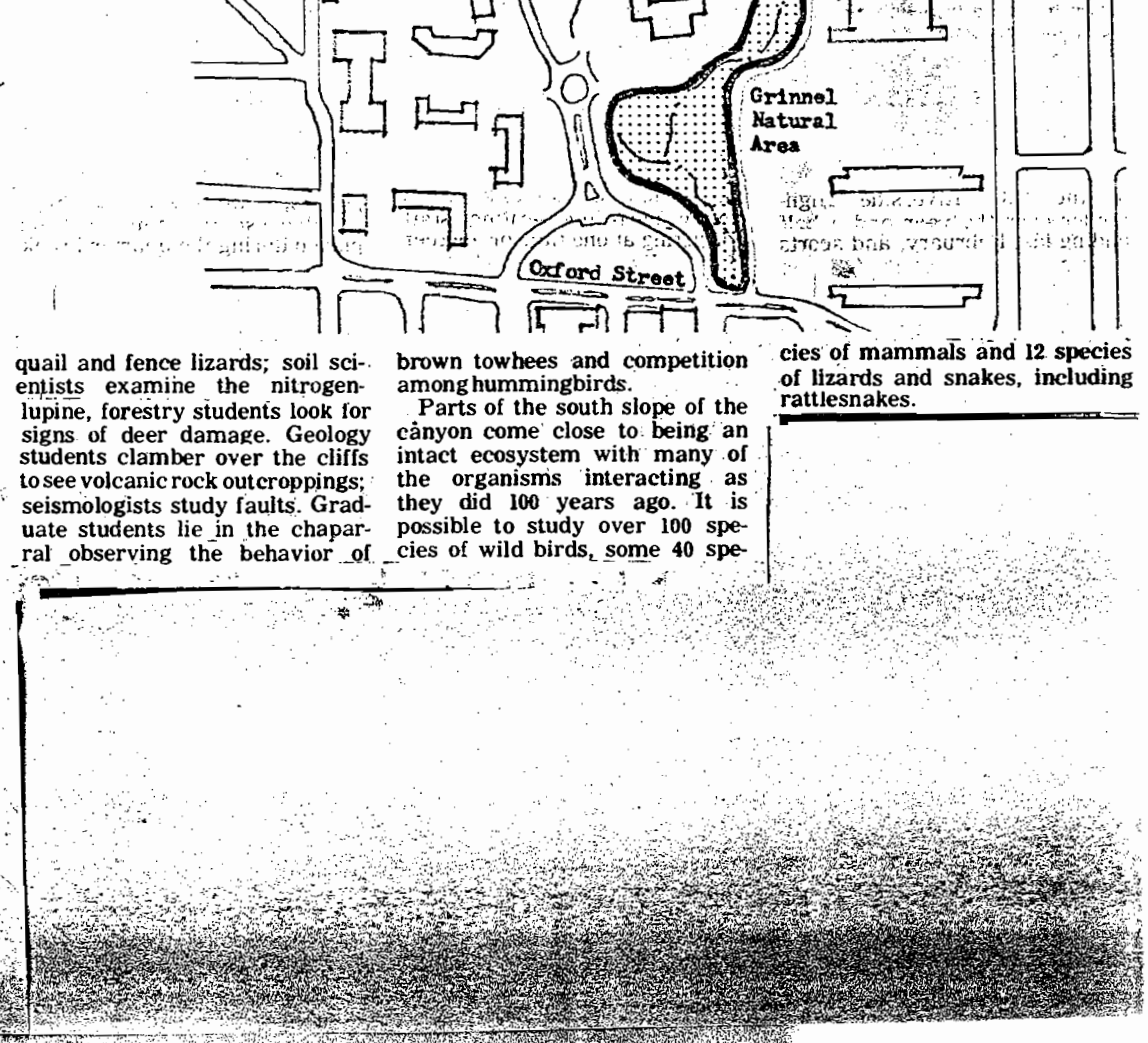

Photo by Jim Yudelson
Wickson Grove