

Volunteer Spotlight | Jack Glendening

In this edition of Ventana Wilderness Watch, we get to know local explorer and mapping expert Jack Glendening. Some of you may know of Jack through his excellent collection of online and interactive maps of the Ventana and Silver Peak, available at www.ventanahiking.net. Jack has graciously allowed the VWA to use his research in a mapping project to support our fundraising (see pages 4 and 5). Born in New Hampshire and raised near New York City, Jack got started in hiking by spending many a summer day exploring the White Mountains of the Granite State. It was there that he learned to appreciate rocky ridges above the tree line and the views they afford. Jack's educational pursuits eventually brought him to the West. After earning his Ph.D. in Atmospheric Science in Seattle, Jack came to Monterey to teach and conduct research at the Naval Postgraduate School and later the Naval Research Laboratory. He is now retired. Flying aircraft is one of Jack's passions. He flies both power planes and sailplanes (gliders). Jack used to spend more time flying than hiking. But on the very day that the Basin Complex Fire started (6/21/08), he had a fire of his own while aloft in his self-launching sailplane. This type of plane has an engine and propeller which is used for takeoff. Jack safely executed an emergency landing that day but the incident took him away from the sport due to complications in restoring his craft.

These days, Jack spends considerably more time hiking and "GPS-ing." We were fortunate to catch up with Jack when the rainy March weather prevented him from taking a planned trip to Lost Valley.

Q: What prompted you to start your Ventana/Silver Peak trail mapping project?

One day I tried to reach Cook Spring Camp using a map with a trail line leading there from the Carrizo Trail. As Ventana-knowledgeable folks know, there in fact is no such trail. So I then tried to bushwhack to the camp using my GPS. Ultimately I gave up (which turned out to be a good thing since the camp is not at that mapped location so I'd have arrived to find zilch). I've hiked trails in New Hampshire and Colorado using maps that can be trusted. I was quite startled to find that Ventana maps can lie so egregiously. I decided that was worth rectifying since current technology makes trail mapping relatively easy.



Q: How do you use technology in the backcountry?

People likely think of me as a technophile because I have a technical bent and use a GPS in my hiking. But I don't usually carry a cell phone, don't own an eBook reader or iPad or even a TV. On the other hand, I'm not adverse to using technology which makes my hike more enjoyable or more interesting. I was exposed to GPS capabilities early in its development because GPS has been revolutionary for glider pilots – it's very important to know exactly how far one is from an airport! Having that experience, I think of a GPS as I think of my 4WD vehicle – it extends my capabilities, allowing me to do things I otherwise couldn't. For unmaintained trails, I have found a GPS very helpful in keeping me from going off on a wrong tangent, since often one finds multiple possible "trails" and having to investigate each takes time and energy. As a bushwhacker who dislikes brush, I often use Google Earth to map out a "least brushy" route before going out since better routes are more easily seen from above than amidst the brush. I can then go further than I would otherwise be able. Since I do a lot of solo hiking, I carry along an emergency beacon, just as I carry a space blanket. I carry my cell phone when I lead a group hike.

Q: Of the maps and tools you've created, which is your favorite?

Because it's the most unique and took more intellectual skill, it's my "route metrics" calculator. It provides the distance and cumulative elevation gain between any two trailhead/intersections in the Ventana and Silver Peak areas. I haven't seen anything like that elsewhere and find it really helpful in planning my own hikes. (Please see: http://ventanahiking.net/route_metrics.html)

Q: Why is your mapping work important to you?

I think it's important to improve wilderness accessibility so more people can experience it and value it. Those who don't experience it are unlikely to value it; and if unvalued, it is more likely to be lost. Working to maintain trails does that. So does providing accurate maps of trails which are minimally maintained, encouraging people to go places they might otherwise hesitate to attempt. I hope to increase "natural" trail maintenance, i.e. keeping brush down by simply having more people walking the same route.

Q: Is there any place for which you have a special affection?

Yes, but I'm not going to tell you what it is! Some people like to keep a special place secret, so it is "their" place. I'm not quite that secretive so I've put my "special" place on my trail map. But I don't tell folks how special I think it is – they will have to discover that for themselves.



Jack Glendening on the Miller Canyon "trail."