

Berkeleyside

Large rattlesnake causes traffic back-up on Berkeley trail

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Photo: Tracey Taylor

A rattlesnake, about three-feet long, crossing the Claremont Canyon fire trail Tuesday evening.

Berkeley's Claremont Canyon fire trail, one of the city's most popular spots for swift bouts of aerobic hiking, is also a source of regular diversions. Last week it was an intriguing note, taped to a barrier at the foot of the path, which caught our attention.

Yesterday it was a potentially more dangerous beast. A rattlesnake, approximately three-feet long, crossed the trail not once but twice as this intrepid reporter made her way first up the hill, and then down. One encounter with a deadly serpent might seem inadvisable; two seems consciously irresponsible.

The snake's decision to make its leisurely way across the fire trail was noticed by several hikers on their evening work-outs. At least three chose to wait for the snake "to cross the road" before continuing on their way — a minor pedestrian traffic jam if you will. Its rattle, by the way, was quite audible (at least when one removed one's iPod earbuds).

The slithering reptile could have been a mite disoriented because the trail has very recently been churned up and widened using earth-moving equipment — much of the brush and bushes on either side have been pulled up by their roots and cleared from the path.

On this subject, reader Mark Humbert writes in to say he is concerned the monster machine may have overdone it. "The trail needs periodic maintenance, of course, but this work seems very excessive," he said. "Lots of plants ripped out, lots of loose material, creation of potential for much erosion with the commencement of the rains, etc. Maybe there is some justification for the scope of work, and I am no expert, but it seems patently excessive to me. It's going to be a mess of mud when the rains start unless the surface is compacted, that's for sure."

As for the rattler, it may simply have been looking for its former home.

The California Department of Fish and Game has helpful information about rattlesnakes on its website.