

By JEFF MEYERS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Linda Palmer does not have to go to Disneyland to find enchantment—it's there for her on the trails of the Santa Monica Mountains.

"A trail is a magical space within a space," said Palmer, an engaging Calabasas grandmother with a passion for the outdoors.

Palmer even has allegorical dreams about trails. "I once dreamed that I walked into a room that was bigger on the inside than it looked on the outside," she said. "It was just a wonderful feeling. That's what trails can mean within a community."

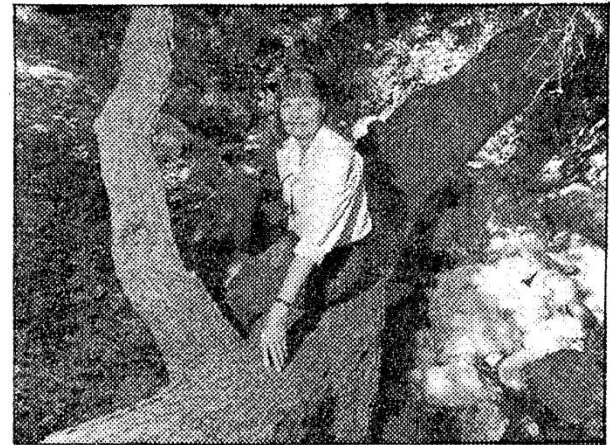
Palmer's fascination with trails has turned her into one of the area's leading trails activists. As president of the Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council for the past 10 years, she shares other dreams with the 100 members of the nonprofit organization.

By building new trails and patching old bulldozer tracks, fire roads and maybe even an ancient Chumash Indian trail or two into the Backbone Trail, the Trails Council envisions a comprehensive 200-plus-mile network of interconnecting trails with primitive trail camps set up along the way from Griffith Park to Point Mugu.

In the early 1980s, Los Angeles County included the trail system in its area plan for the mountains, mapping 23 trails suggested by the Trails Council. Today, however, none of the 23

# The Pathfinder

Linda Palmer  
of Calabasas Walks  
a Diplomatic Line  
as a Champion for  
the Preservation of  
Regional Trails



have been completed, only a few connections have actually been made, and most of the trails and fire roads remain isolated.

Palmer spends about 40 hours a week as an unpaid advocate, dealing with bureaucrats, developers and private landowners to prevent the easements for the proposed trail system from getting paved over or closed to the public.

"We try to make sure these pieces of easement don't fall through the cracks," she said. Before the county established the area plan, "Trails were not saved," she said. "They were lost forever."

Developers and private land owners, she said, generally have been cooperative. "Typically, people will recognize

trails as a good thing after we explain the benefits. 'No' is usually their first reaction. 'Why me? Why not put it over there?' Even trail users will find a reason to put it on a neighbor's land," she said.

For landowners, the benefits of a trail in their back yard include having access to the mountains without the need to drive to a park. "One woman couldn't understand why the Zuma Ridge Trail had to be on her property where she wanted to put up a barn," Palmer said. "But when we explained that one day the trail will go from Malibu to Ventura, she said, 'I can ride my horses all that way?!' Then she hugged me."

The Trails Council was established in 1972 when the construction of