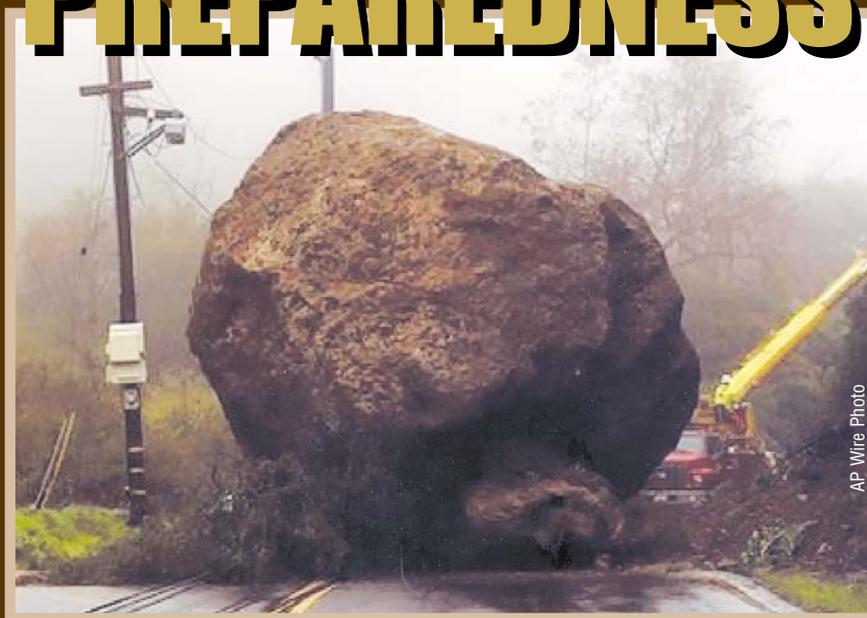


FLOOD, SLIDE, AND STORM PREPAREDNESS

During the record rains of 2005, an immense round rock rolled smack-dab into the middle of Highway 27 and achieved a kind of instant celebrity status. Thankfully, no one was injured. The now-famous AP wire photo shown here made headlines from New York to China. Postcards and T-shirts featuring

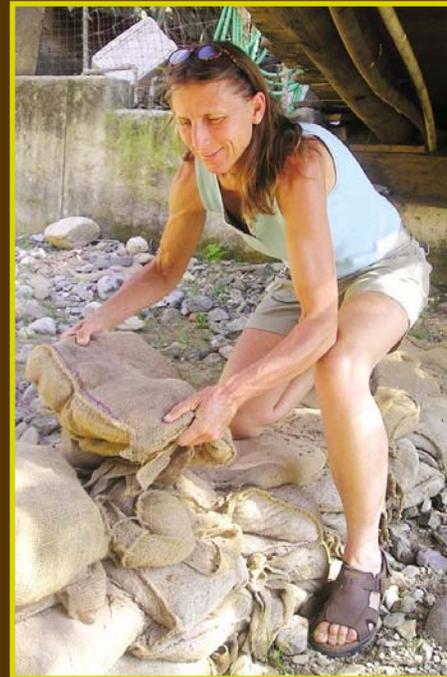


the monolith's mug shot flooded local markets (at least, the two here in Topanga). But its celebrity was short-lived as Caltrans needed to open the road, so the rock was soon dynamited to pebbledom. Topangans will forever feel "sedimental" about this genuine Topanga rock star that became a legend in its own time.

P R E P A R E D N E S S R O C K S

B E F O R E T H E F L O O D

- 1.** *Assess the safety of your house and belongings in case of a flood or mudslide. Are you near a creek? Do you live above or below a steep hillside? Do you have to drive over a creek or bridge to get to a main road?*
- 2.** *Maintain supplies for at least three days in case you are isolated.*
- 3.** *Clean drains around the house and house gutters in the fall before the winter rains come. Check drains on nearby streets. If blocked, clean them or notify road maintenance.*
- 4.** *If diversion of water or mud could be necessary, plan to fill sandbags ahead of time in order to be ready for their use. (Sandbags are available at your local fire station.)*
- 5.** *Maintain all slopes in a safe manner. Use appropriate plantings, slope coverage, and drainage channels. For information on drought- and fire-resistant plantings, contact the Resource Conservation District at 310-455-1030 and/or the Fire Department at 818-222-1108.*



Above: Cheney Canyon Renaissance woman Laura Bateman demonstrates the proper placement of sandbags at her home on Paradise Lane. In 1980 the Garapito Creek along Paradise Lane swelled and inundated the neighborhood (see the following two pages). Except for a negligible puddle inside Laura's front door, sandbags did the job and kept the water out.

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DURING THE FLOOD

1. *Don't cross rapidly flowing streams. Stay on one side until the water recedes. Most streams in this area go down in a couple of hours once it stops raining.*

2. *During the storm, check drainage systems at your house and driveways to maintain a safe situation and limit damage.*

3. *Watch for mudslides and adjust drainage to reduce mudslides.*

4. *Keep family and animals inside and away from rapid water.*

5. *If you notice a major mud slippage either above or below your house, move your family to a safe location and notify your neighbors and County officials as appropriate.*



Paradise Lane, 2005

Paradise Lane, 1980

SURVIVAL FACTOID

Mother Nature dumped a record 64.82 inches of rain on the Robinson Road area of Topanga in 2004–2005. This topped 55 inches that fell in 1978 and 1998. Data kept by Lee Haines, founder of the Pierce College weather station in 1949, and augmented by Topanga residents in recent years, showed an average of 24.9 inches during the past 45 years.

Photo: Courtesy of Topanga Messenger

The “S Curves,” 1980

Torrential rains washed out Topanga Canyon Blvd. in many places and damaged the water main. Afterward, the roadway was “hardened” by building retaining walls and fortifying the banks with boulders and Shotcrete. Repairs took over one year, forcing residents to take circuitous detours to get in and out of town.

1. Assess damage; check hillsides, houses, etc. for slope movement, settling, and water damage.

2. Following a storm, drive slowly and carefully as many roads may have mud, debris, holes, and washed-out areas.

3. Check with ladpw.org or www.t-cep.org to find out what roads in Topanga, if any, have sustained damage.

4. Remember, many mudslides occur as the soils dry, after an extended wet period.

5. Winter is often the best time to plant slopes, so make plans and fix any problems caused by storms before you forget about them.

Photograph by JoAnn Hilston

9 A F T E R T H E F L O O D

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SURVIVOR'S STORY

**CHENEY CANYON 2005
MUD SLIDE**



**CARL and JENNIFER
STROM**

The Cheney Drive couple is shown posing in front of the leading edge of "Strom's Folly," as Carl has nicknamed the creeping mass of mud. Thick-diameter rebar was pounded deep in the ground to hold the concrete barriers in place that kept the mud from oozing out into the busy street.

*There was no cataclysm,
no running down the hill with a
wall of mud at our heels.
Just a gradual opening up
of the earth.*

On the morning of January 10, 2005, I looked out the living room window through the downpour and saw a gap about a yard wide in the slope below. Oh, I thought, when the rain ends we'll have to do some shoveling to fill that in. But as the gap grew, its meaning hit me. This was the whole hillside on the move. It could take our driveway. And even our house.



At the start, the slide severed our water pipe and the next-door neighbor's. When we realized water was gushing right into the top of the slide, making it worse, we called the Waterworks District, and they got a crew out here right away. They crimped the two pipes, but that was only a temporary fix. Our meters and shut-off valves were buried by then, so the only way to stop the water was to dig down to the water main under the street and seal off our connections. The workers spent a night and a day in the downpour, digging five feet under the road at the foot of a moving mudslide, with occasional angry drivers demanding they stop work and let traffic through. Then one crew even stayed on into the second evening to set up temporary water service for our two houses with a set of garden hoses. Those Waterworks guys were our heroes.

The first couple of days, our place was swarming with people from the Waterworks District, curious neighbors with digital cameras, the road maintenance people trying to keep Cheney Drive

open at the foot of the slide, a roads engineer, and a County geologist whose role I didn't understand until she said, "Well, I guess we won't have to red-tag you...at least for now."

It hardly seemed like a disaster because it all happened in slow motion. There was no cataclysm, no running down the hill with a wall of mud at our heels. Just a gradual opening up of the earth. One clump of young oaks took three weeks to sail majestically down the hillside, standing on its raft of roots and grasses.

Our neighbors were great. The phone kept ringing with offers

of food, help, a place to sleep, a shoulder to cry on, many from people we hardly knew. Even if we didn't take people up on their offers, it was reassuring to feel the flow of friendship and sympathy that didn't stop even as the weeks went by with the road narrowed to one lane and a whole neighborhood of perpetually mud-splattered cars, not to mention the traffic waiting each time more mud had to be trucked out.

There was a continual flow of onlookers parking cars, walking by, and coming up the driveway to get a closer look. At first it was hard to get used to the cameras. Our family fortune was

Muddling Through

BY JENNIFER STROM

sliding down the hill, and people seemed to see it as entertainment. It took a while for me to get a grip and see it their way: the gaping hillside, the bowels of the earth spilled out, the trees hanging by their roots—it was a phenomenon that merits seeing and photographing and talking about. It was Nature showing us who's boss, a thing we all need to witness now and then.

The scarp had grown from a crack to a twenty-foot cliff. New cracks began to show in the driveway, which runs along the top of the slide. But the house, only fifteen feet above the driveway in some places, held firm. Coming only weeks after the tsunami in south Asia, our little disaster seemed inconsequential. We were lucky: we had a choice whether to be victims or not. At first, our options looked grim: default and leave the problem for the bank? File for bankruptcy? Would there be help from FEMA? A year ago, we'd bought a piece of land in another part of Topanga, hoping to build ourselves a smaller, greener house to live in. Maybe we'd have to sell that land. Then, the second night after the slide started, I woke up at 2:00 A.M. thinking, *We don't have to give up. We can handle this!* That morning, Carl and I made lists of ways to overcome our problem. Since then, it has been our fight first, to save our house, then to rebuild the hillside, and finally, to figure out a way to pay for it all.

As disaster victims, we needed to deal with the Federal

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Small Business Administration (SBA) and six County agencies. The process has not been easy. Each agency has gone out of its way to expedite our application but the process is still lengthy. We have no choice but to

be patient. We're working with the system, and the system will require us to rebuild the hillside better than before. That's not a bad thing: when all is said and done, this house will be as secure as any in Topanga.

Now it's mid-June, and we're nearing the end of the permit process. We're still waiting for that SBA loan. The mudslide has become like a full-time job shared by the two of us. The uncertainty of it all has been wearing. Discouragement comes in waves, but one or the other of us is always ready to fight back, and so we've pulled each other through. We've looked around a little at places we could move to out of state and live inexpensively, if it comes to that. But now it's looking like we can marshal our assets to pay for the mudslide and stay in Topanga.

We're lucky. We had a choice. This could have been the year we lost our savings and had to sell out and leave Topanga. But now it's looking more like it might be the year we discovered some new talents, pulled together a quarter-of-a-million-dollar reconstruction project, and muddled through.

**I woke up at 2:00 A.M. thinking,
*We don't have to give up.
We can handle this!***



NOTES