

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BOY SCOUT EAGLE PROJECT BLENDS TECHNOLOGY AND OUTDOORS Groundbreaking Advances in Parks and Recreation Using Quick Response Codes

In the latest National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, more than 191 million people actively participate in walking, almost 90 million bicycle and millions of others enjoy spending time in other outdoor activities. The number of people enjoying time in outdoor recreation has increased more than 50% in the last 5 years, according to the same survey, and it's clear that this trend will continue.

In San Diego, the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve in San Diego inland North County is a favorite for families to enjoy outdoor activities, due to its wealth of flora and fauna, plus its multitude of trails covering over 25 miles and open space of over 5,000 acres. Boy Scout Yash Huilgol, from Troop 667 is among the thousands of visitors to the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve every year, and has been exploring the canyon with his family since he was very young. On a recent outing to the preserve with his younger sister, he realized that specific, detailed information about the trails and canyon were difficult to find, particularly for new visitors, in order to make simple decisions about what to see and do in the Canyon. At that time the primary tool available to visitors of the canyon preserve was only a simple trail map furnished by the park and did not provide detailed trail or site information to visitors.

As an Eagle Scout Candidate, 16-year old Yash Huilgol knew that he wanted to use technology to enhance the current map by providing a specialized and easy-to-access webpage for visitors. As a member of a generation that has embraced mobile technology, he intuitively knew he wanted to capitalize on the huge base of Americans with mobile and smart phones to deliver this information.

A 2011 Pew Internet & American Life Project survey on the most popular source for local community information found that nearly half of the adults (47%) used mobile devices to get local community knowledge. Not surprising particularly popular searches are for "out and about" items. Predictably people are hungry for information on what to do outside. For someone under 40 years old the internet is the primary source for local community information, with other studies emphasizing that adults ages 18 to 33 are the most likely to access information wirelessly with a mobile smart phone.

In order to provide electronic information, on-line reference points in the physical world from which to guide visitors were needed. To begin with, Yash decided to refurbish the existing mile markers and trail crossing signs in the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. In discussions with his Eagle Scout Leadership Project Counselor, Beverly Flynn, and speaking with Park Rangers Gina Washington and Paul Kucharczyk the blending of technology with the outdoors began to take shape. Yash Huilgol took three months and worked for over 40 hours to carefully refine and fine tune the project plan. After completing the plan, an army of friends, family, and other Boy Scouts, led by Yash, refurbished 24 mile markers and creek crossing signs in the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. By sanding, repainting, and in some case rebuilding the wooden signs, it made the trails safer and easier to

identify, and allowed families to make sure that they know how far they have travelled on the trail. With the trail reference points in place the real magic of the virtual trail project could begin.

For the electronic portion of the project, he compiled a digital packet comprising essential trail data for hikers, bikers, equestrians and other visitors to the canyon, three interactive trail maps and Quick Response (QR) Codes which each corresponded to each separate mile marker in the Preserve. QR codes are square “barcodes” used to quickly link a mobile device to large amounts of data, usually a webpage on the internet. These were originally developed by the automotive industry for tracking parts manufacturing information, but have since grown to be used in magazine advertising and store front advertising.

This is the first project of its kind to use QR codes to link outdoor users with detailed electronic on-line information in parks and for recreational use. Yash Huilgol further explored the potential for QR Codes by creating a website for his Eagle Project (www.pgcanyon.com) that enabled visitors in the Canyon, as well as at home to access the plethora of information gathered in his digital packet.

As one of the interactive maps contained in the “Digital Packet,” Yash Huilgol also created a virtual tour of the Adobe Ranch House, so visitors can preview what attractions one can expect. This tour includes six out of the many points of interest in the building, with topics of historic, as well as locational importance. The Ranch House Virtual tour is a great option for visitors curious about the building, as well as those who want more information about the National Historic and Archaeological Site.

In addition to providing a map for the Ranch House, he compiled a Virtual Trail Guide, which included multiple ways to access relevant trail information for the various users of the Canyon. This guide, given in a plain text format accessible by many mobile devices (Smartphones, iPods, iPads), is individually customized for each mile marker, with distances from each of the mile markers, creek crossings, and trailheads. QR Codes will be eventually placed on each of the Mile Markers in the Preserve, giving information relative to the user’s location. Also, accessible at the trailhead kiosks, are QR Codes linking to the Interactive Trail Map, which can be used to plan your trip into the Preserve as well.

Senior City Park Ranger Gina Washington stated “I am really excited to have the interactive map available for the public. This map will really help first time visitors to the Preserve by giving them a better idea of where they are and where they want to go. This project has great potential for other uses; for example QR codes and the map could be used by the Fire Department to locate injured trail users. It is very thrilling to be one of the first parks to integrate this technology into our interpretive program.”

To find out how to make the project more accessible and helpful, Yash Huilgol has also presented the project multiple times to various groups, including his Troop’s Patrol Leader’s Council, the Friends of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Citizen’s Advisory Committee, Rancho Peñasquitos Town Council, Rancho Bernardo Recreation Council demonstrating what he has done. After being featured on the front page of the Rancho Peñasquitos Town Council website, community feedback on the project has been pouring in. The community is genuinely excited about this new idea. “I plan on continuing to volunteer my time to improve and enhance the project to make it more accessible and easier to use. This is just the first step in creating a useful interactive website,” says Yash.

Yash has presented to the San Diego County Parks and Recreation Department, to apprise them of what he had done in the Preserve. "The innovation behind the QR code concept is a great example of where mobile technology is going, and we are proud at Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve to have been a part of Yash's great project. We couldn't be happier with his accomplishments," said San Diego County Parks and Recreation Supervising Ranger Paul Kucharczyk.

After the final Eagle Project was completed, both Ranger Gina Washington and Ranger Paul Kucharczyk were very pleased with the results. According to Ranger Gina Washington, "It has been such a pleasure to work with Yash on this project. He has demonstrated great ingenuity and thoughtfulness. I see real leadership potential and look forward to seeing and hearing the name Yash Huilgol associated with some major projects in the future."

Yash Huilgol stated "This unique project helped me see how much a small string of ideas with an inspiration can make a difference in our community." More than 500 volunteer hours have been donated by Yash and other members of the community to make the virtual trails project come to life. The inaugural implementation of virtual trails for the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve is simply the innovative first step in an information revolution that blends the physical and virtual worlds to enhance outdoor recreational use for many people.

Yash Huilgol is a member of Boy Scout Troop 667 which was founded in 1988 and meets at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Rancho Peñasquitos.

Boy Scouts of America's program goal is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities. Boy Scouts Troop 667 instills a responsibility for leadership and preparedness in its members.

For more information on Boy Scouting contact Scoutmaster Gregory Chapelle, 858.484.2580, scoutmaster@troop667.info.

PHOTOS INCLUDED

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Photo 1
Caption: Eagle leadership project volunteers working with the Rancho Penasquitos Open Space Park Rangers to renovate the trail markers.
Names (left to right): Ranger John Smith, Ranger Revon Hana, Jordan Blackman, Carter Andrews, Andrew Martinez, Raymond Rowe, Shreya Huilgol, Yash Huilgol, Emmitt Pert, Sharad Huilgol, Ranger Ranan Abdulahad.



Photo 2

Caption: Trail marker renovation and painting to help trail users as part of the Virtual Trails Project in Rancho Penasquitos Canyon Open Space.

Names (left to right): Emmit Pert, Andrew Martinez, Jordan Blackman, Shreya Huilgol, Yash Huilgol.



Photo 3

Caption: Eagle Scout candidate Yash Huilgol with City Park Ranger Gina Washington and one of the renovated mile markers in Rancho Penasquitos Canyon Open Space.

Names (left to right): Yash Huilgol and Ranger Gina Washington.

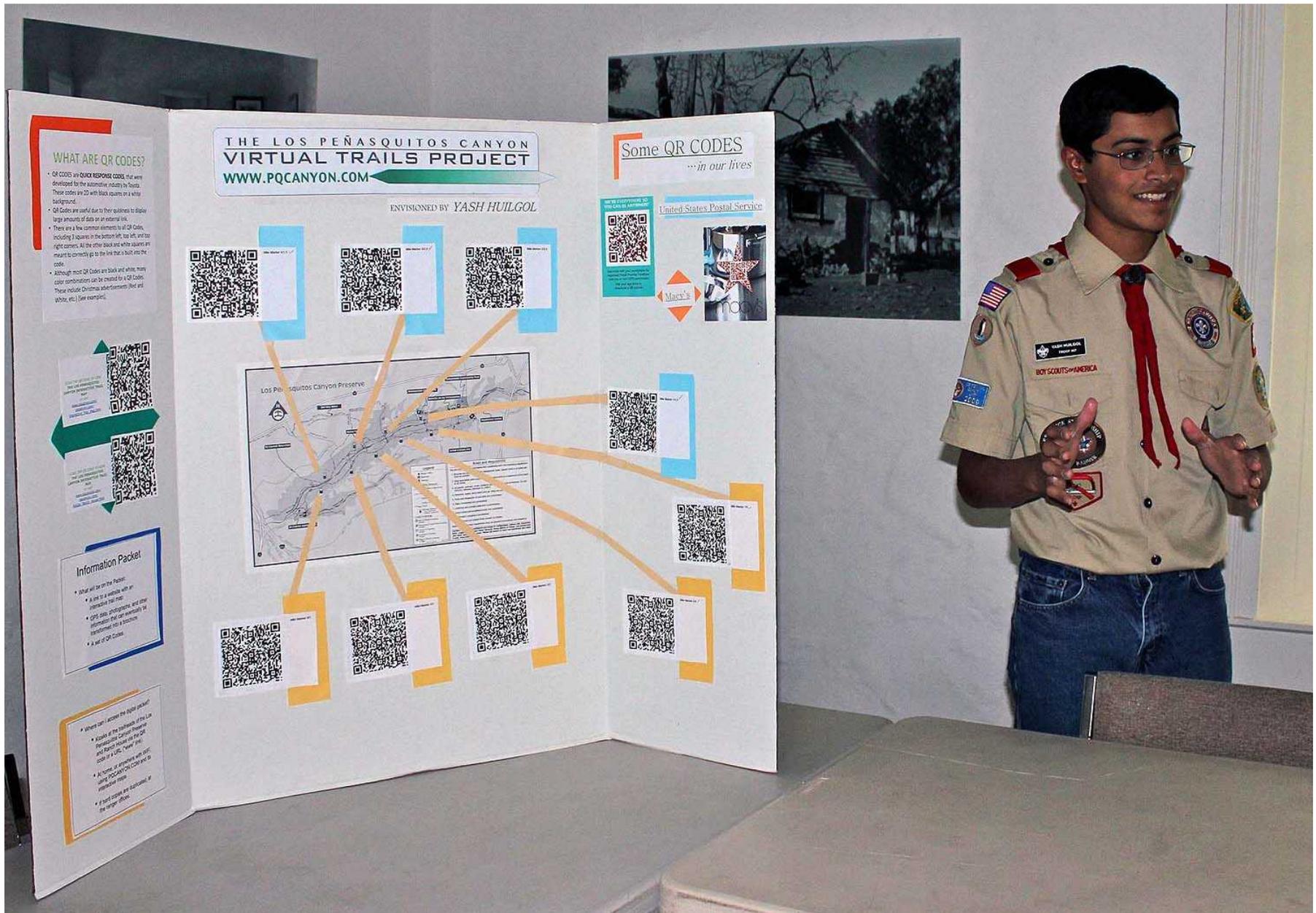


Photo 4
Caption: Eagle Scout candidate Yash Huilgol in front of his QR code presentation at a meeting of one of the community groups interested in adopting his revolutionary concept.



Photo 5

Caption: Sample QR code linking the physical trail marker location with the webpage for pqcanyon virtual trails information.