



Rate yourself on the SMART-O-METER

Drag to become simply smart

Holiday Inn EXPRESS Stay Smart.®

search  Go 4:33 AM PDT, August 29, 2006

[JOBS](#) [CARS](#) [REAL ESTATE](#) [APARTMENTS](#) [SHOPPING](#) | [WEATHER](#) [TRAFFIC](#)

California | Local News

Print E-mail story Most e-mailed Change text size



**HOME**  
Site Map

- California/Local
- Los Angeles
- Orange County
- S.F. Valley
- Ventura County
- Inland Empire
- Community Papers
- Burbank Leader
- Crescenta Valley
- Glendale
- Huntington Beach
- La Cañada Valley
- Laguna Beach
- Newport Beach

- NEWS**
- California | Local
  - National
  - World
  - Entertainment News
  - Business
  - Sports
  - Politics
  - Opinion
  - Columnists
  - Print Edition
  - What is RSS?

- Calendarlive
- Travel
- West Magazine
- House & Garden
- Health
- Food
- Car Culture
- Obituaries
- Crossword, Sudoku
- All Sections
- Corrections

- BUY, SELL & MORE**
- Jobs
  - Cars
  - Real Estate
  - Apartments
  - Personals
  - Deals at Local
  - Stores
  - Coupons
  - Newspaper Ads

PLACE AN AD

- MEMBER SERVICES**
- Log Out
  - Help
  - Contact Us
  - L.A. Times Archives
  - Customized News
  - E-mail Newsletters

- HOME DELIVERY**
- Customer Support
  - Subscribe to L.A. Times



## CHP Seeks to Clear Canyons of Junked Vehicles

**Southland's wild areas have become graveyards for cars after wrecks or deliberate acts. The agency wants to remove as many as is feasible.**

By Lynn Doan, Times Staff Writer  
August 29, 2006

Two months after a motorist was killed when his car veered off a Carbon Canyon road and plunged into a ravine hundreds of feet below, the wreckage of his green 1997 Honda Civic remains scattered about the canyon floor.

The battered vehicle rests upside down amid its mangled parts. A twisted fender here, the windshield there and two dusty tires poke from the thick brush in this unlikely auto graveyard between Malibu and Calabasas. A few feet away is a bulkier yellow car propped on its side.

ADVERTISEMENT

**FREE DAY OUT ON US!**

Get a free admission to a local attraction when you visit our new store and purchase \$50 or more.

California Highway Patrol Officer Ray Abramian, who has patrolled these canyon roads for five years, doesn't recall the story behind the yellow car. As is often the case with abandoned vehicles, time and weather have erased all evidence of ownership.

The CHP spray-paints large red and orange Xs across the hoods and bellies of these vehicles to show that they've been inspected for human remains.

Perhaps, Abramian said, as he leaned over a guardrail overlooking the wreckage on a recent outing, the car belonged to the suicidal teenager who sped off a cliff years ago and perished in a fiery crash. Or maybe it was that of a Redondo Beach woman who apologized to her 7-year-old daughter before plunging her car down a 200-foot cliff in 1988, killing herself and injuring the girl.

Most likely, he said, the car belonged to a drunk or reckless driver who missed a turn and ended up in the ravine with a few cuts and bruises. Such is the case with many of the cars littering Malibu, Tuna and Carbon canyons.

"A lot of these guys decide to cut their losses and literally just walk away from the wreck," Abramian said.

During an aerial check last week, the CHP counted at least 14 wrecked cars littering the floor of Carbon Canyon. Indeed, several canyons on Los Angeles County's outskirts have become junkyards of sorts — the final resting place for wrecked or abandoned cars.

Tow truck operators have deemed many of the vehicles irretrievable, while state officials have determined that airlifting the rusting bodies would either be too risky or too costly.

But that doesn't mean law enforcement should ignore the situation, said CHP Capt. Steve Badilla, head of the agency's Woodland Hills office, which patrols the unincorporated area near Malibu.

"As anyone would be, I was concerned that we, as an organization, are leaving cars over the side like that," said Badilla, who took over the office last year. "It just doesn't seem appropriate."

When Badilla discovered the growing pile of cars in his district last month, he pushed Abramian to seek funding and collaboration with other state agencies to retrieve some of the vehicles. Abramian is meeting with state park ecologists to determine the safest

### MORE CALIFORNIA NEWS

- [Brush Fire Spreads Quickly](#)
- [Mayor Flexes Muscle With School Board](#)
- [Mail Bonding: Neighbors Hate to See the Blue Boxes Go](#)
- [Hope Tempers First-Day Jitters at New South L.A. Charter Schools](#)
- [State Proposes Limit for Perchlorate in Drinking Water](#)

### MOST VIEWED MOST E-MAILED

- [Cruise Makes Financing Deal With Investors](#)
- [Iraq Army Battles Shiites](#)
- [These People Are Working for Us?](#)

latimes.com on the Move

- E-MAIL:** News sent directly to you.
- RSS:** Pick the topics, create your page.
- WIRELESS:** L.A. Times any time, anywhere on your mobile device.
- PODCASTS:** Tune in to L.A. Times podcasts.
- NEWSPOINT:** All the news you choose, delivered to your desktop.

ADVERTISEMENT

**Welcome to our family.**

**TIME WARNER CABLE**  
THE POWER OF YOU™



LOCAL ADS Buy a link

**Screaming Stock Picks**

Stocks, Penny Stocks, Investments and Hot Stock Tips.  
www.screamingstocks....

**Mortgages**

1st & 2nd Mortgages. Debt Consolidation. Low rates, Bad Credit welcome  
www.mortgagereerrals....

way to remove the junk cars without disturbing wildlife.

Starting this week, Badilla said, his office would begin calling tow truck companies to pull out about half a dozen vehicles that are among the most accessible. Cars that have to be airlifted out will have to wait until Badilla can secure the funding.

One of those cars is the Civic found at the bottom of Carbon Canyon that belonged to Michael Dornheim, 51, a senior engineering editor for Aviation Week who was killed in the accident earlier this summer.

Only a rubber scuff mark remains on a Pioma Road guardrail where Dornheim swerved off the cliff and into the ravine.

On June 12, sheriff's deputies spotted his vehicle below an embankment in the canyon. The ravine is two miles east of Saddle Peak Lodge, where Dornheim was last seen dining with friends a week earlier.

Investigators are "scratching their heads" as to how his car ended up in the ravine, CHP spokesman Leland Tang said. Some friends of Dornheim said he may have dozed off. No one knows for sure.

"He navigated the turns just fine, and then, in a straightaway, for whatever reason, he went off the cliff," Tang said. "Not a rock was disturbed. Not even the brush was disturbed."

L.A. County is not the only Southern California county wrestling with the problem of junked cars in its surrounding countryside.

CHP officers often respond to calls about cars driven off remote canyon roads in the San Bernardino National Forest near Lake Arrowhead. In Riverside County, a portion of the 60 Freeway known as the "Badlands" is notorious for sending vehicles into the canyons below.

And CHP Officer Stephen Miles, who patrols the sinuous Ortega Highway in south Orange County, said a number of cars have been left by "folks losing control in curves, criminals intentionally dumping stolen vehicles over the side in hopes they won't be found and the occasional suicide." Trabuco Canyon in particular has become known as an auto graveyard, he said.

"Whenever possible, we try to recover them with tow trucks, but some vehicles cannot be brought up," Miles said.

Badilla said he has changed the protocol that officers must abide by when responding to an off-road collision.

"It will be standard practice for supervisors and officers responding to collision scenes to assess right away whether we can tow the car right then," he said. "They can elect to recover it the following day, but we're going to get those vehicles out of there."

**MORE CALIFORNIA NEWS**

- [Brush Fire Spreads Quickly](#)
- [Mayor Flexes Muscle With School Board](#)
- [Mail Bonding: Neighbors Hate to See the Blue Boxes Go](#)



**PHOTO SHARING**



Check out our reader-uploaded photographs and share your own at [Your Scene](#).

[Submit your photo now >>](#)

