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A 100-foot wall now protects LA's Zanja Madre from mud slides and other damage, while permitting a view of the historic "Mother Ditch." Photo by Dave Walker.



Metro Built a Wall to Protect LA's Historic Zanja Madre

By JIMMY STROUP

(April 27, 2006) A 100-foot wall meant to protect LA's historic Zanja Madre water aqueduct from mud slides, erosion and rain damage now surrounds an exposed section uncovered in March, 2005 during an expansion of the Metro Gold Line rail yard.

The 15-foot-high wall, completed last week, will shield the 75-foot section of the "Mother Ditch" from damage since it rests at the bottom of a 60-foot hillside.

"We built the wall to protect it from the hillside caving in onto it," said Dave Walker, Metro construction manager of the protective project.

The recent rains showed that the wall was going to be a necessary addition if the Zanja Madre were to be left exposed: mud created by the storms washed down the hillside and covered the brick- and mortar-lined tube.

Not to be dissuaded, Walker and his crew used the slide to their advantage as a way to protect the historic waterway while the wall was under construction.

'Left it covered'

"Before we started building the wall, the rain washed the hillside behind it down onto the Zanja and covered it up," he said. "We just left it covered to protect it while we built the wall behind it and then cleaned it all up once we'd finished."

The four-foot wide Zanja Madre segment was evaluated by archeologists when it was first uncovered. Walker said the scientists recommended that they expose the outer areas, but leave it as intact as possible.

"The middle of it was filled with silt and the archeologists told us to leave that in it. It'd keep it from caving in," he said.

The first segments of the Zanja Madre were built in 1781 to provide domestic and irrigation water from the Los Angeles River to the early settlers. The Zanja Madre fed as many as nine smaller ditches – or zanjás – and was used in older parts of the city until as late as 1904.

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