

The History of Topa Topa Lodge

Topa Topa Lodge #291 is among the oldest Official Order of the Arrow lodges within the BSA. Officially chartered in 1944 from a pre-existing honor society in Ventura County Council, Topa Topa has remained constantly chartered each year for the past 67 years with the BSA. Our current membership is just more than 400 active members, in seven chapters (4 Big Brother and 3 Little Brother Chapters). As the second largest lodge in Section W-4-N, Topa Topa actively supports OA at the Section and National levels. Recently, Topa Topa's Jack Chinn served as the very first Section W-4-N Chief (a result of realigning the Western Region) from 2007-2009. Additionally, the Lodge's Howard Kern serves on the National Order of the Arrow Committee.

Many years ago the Chumash Indians roamed the forests and hunted game in the bountiful Ojai Valley. When a bad omen came to the tribe, the great spirit sent two white gophers to chief Matilija. The gophers instructed the chief and his people to perform acts of unselfish service and sacrifice. Chief Matilija perished in a great calamity, but with the acts of service and devotion done, the great spirit sent chief Topa Topa to the Chumash to save the worthy people from an evil horde. In the 1920's the spirit of unselfish service was rekindled at Ventura County Council's Camp Grey. There, the "Tribe of Matilija" was founded as the honor camping organization of the council. The tribe had as its purpose to promote camping at Camp Grey. The Order of the Arrow in Ventura County was established in June of 1944, when ceremonies were conducted during the Camp-O-Ral at Steckel Park to induct 13 selected scouts as charter members of Topa Topa Lodge #291 of the Order of the Arrow. Thus the Order of the Arrow came to replace the "Tribe of Matilija." The new lodge took its name from the legendary Chief Topa Topa.

The first Topa Topa Lodge Executive Committee was comprised of:

- Lodge Chief – Paul Johnson of Troop 202
- Lodge Secretary – Don Armistead of Troop 102
- Lodge Treasurer – Bob Fox of Troop 103

Symbolism of the Topa Topa Lodge Flap

Sure, you've got one of these really nifty 15 color lodge flaps. You know, the one you got when you completed your Ordeal, and the very same one (called the Achievement flap) that you can only get 4 of in your lifetime, one for each level of membership in the OA and for hiking Chief's Peak with your Chapter. BUT, do you know what each of the symbols on



the patch represent? This patch tells quite a story...so sit right back...

Indian Reclining on Mountain:

Chief Topa Topa represents eternity. This figure actually exists on a mountain behind Ojai, CA.

Burnished Shield:

The sun used by Topa Topa as a shield. Protection against evil.

Buffalo Head in Shield:

Signifies sacrifice that others might live.

The Arrow through the Shield:

The arrow that killed Natas. Represents aggressiveness and purpose – an instrument to fight evil – the symbol of our Order.

WWW on the Shield:

The secret designation for the Order of the Arrow, known only by members, represents loyalty and silence.

Arrow Pointing to the East and to Mother Earth – Lodge Underneath

Tells of the resting place of the Twin White Gophers, which is the literal translation of “Topa Topa.” Topa Topa Mountain is to the east of Ojai, and the “Chief” is the reclining figure of Chief Topa Topa. The East and Mother Earth represent life. The tipi is symbolic of the Topa Topa Lodge of the Order of the Arrow; it also represents the medicine lodge of the Twin White Gophers.

The Seven Eagle Feathers under the Shield:

Each feather stands for one of the seven chapters in Ventura County Council’s Topa Topa Lodge. It therefore represents unity and brotherhood of Chapters in the Lodge.

The Indian with the Pipe:

Represents Chief Matilija for unselfish service. The upraised pipe signifies continued service and dedication to the ideas of the Order of the Arrow as well as the perpetuation of the Lodge tradition.

The Lightning:

Represents the power of God to answer prayer and bring about changes.

The Lake and the Sky:

Represents the Universe and Heaven – reminds us of our duty to God and self.

The Blending of Green Grass:

Represents the intermingling and growth of brotherhood and fellowship in the Order of the Arrow.

The Twin White Gophers:

Represents cheerfulness in fulfilling obligations

Chief Peak and our Lodge

The photo depicts one of two Geodetic Survey markers placed in the rocks near the top of Chief Peak. Chief Peak is significant to the Lodge and is depicted on the restricted Lodge flap. From the South, it looks like an Indian reclining on the mountain. The symbolism is that Chief Topa Topa represents eternity.

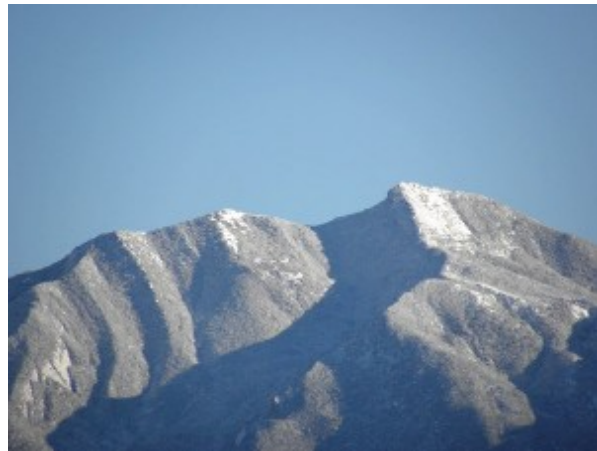


Chief Peak is an approximately 5,600 foot peak, north of Ojai. It is accessible from the South or more easily from the North, starting from the Rose Valley Campground. From the Campground, it is an eight mile round-trip hike. Take a steep road, originally paved by the U.S. Navy Seabees in the 1950s. At the junction, proceed East across Nordhoff Ridge to the base of the peak. There is a defined trail that circles to the West and goes counter-clockwise to the top. Be sure to sign in the visitor book, usually found in a can or a box.

This particular marker, placed in 1959, was the inspiration for a one-inch pin, available from the Lodge Store for \$5. Anyone who has climbed Chief Peak can buy one.

The pin is different from the restricted Lodge flap. One of the four restricted Lodge flaps can be purchased from the Lodge Store, if you have climbed Chief Peak, as part of a Lodge authorized hike and made a pencil etching of the marker and were a part of the group photo at the top of the peak.

Its a million-dollar hike.



Submitted by Tony Waters of the Mighty Mitz.