

Alamos Canyon Trail

THE TRAIL: The trail begins at Oak Park (County of Ventura facility), which is located on the north side of the railroad tracks at the northern end of Quimisa Drive. That road intersects Los Angeles Avenue 2,000 feet west of the city's sewage treatment facility. Quimisa Drive crosses the railroad tracks, a signalized crossing, and turns to the west a short distance and terminates at the entry gate of the county park. Take an envelope from the metal post, insert the required fee and tear off the flap of the envelope and place it on your dashboard with the printed side up. (There is nothing to fill out.) Take the first drive to the north and park at the trailhead, which is well signed. This is the only legal way to gain access to the Alamos Canyon open space. The dirt road takes you over a hill and down to the creek at the southern end of the double culvert under the freeway. Continue along the paved section, which will take you up the hill and under the freeway. You may continue north approximately 1 1/2 miles, and past the Simi Valley Landfill on the eastern side of the road. The trail is well marked with a directional sign and mileage designations. The trail loops up to the west and then down to the south through an oak woodland and back to Alamos Canyon. The trail is approximately 6 miles round trip. The name "*alamos*" refers, in this case, to western sycamore trees, of which there are still some along the main canyon. At the high point along the trail there are bucolic vistas over a vast rolling landscape with only a few hints of a man-modified landscape.

GEOLOGY: The bottom of Alamos Canyon is made up of Holocene Epoch (the last 10-11,000 years) alluvial gravel, sand and silt of floodplain areas. The higher-level areas in the northwest are older terraces of surficial sediments of middle Pleistocene Epoch age, i.e., the last 1.6 million years. The remaining hills are part of the Sespe Formation - which is of the Oligocene Formation (the last 38-24 million years) and is non-marine semi-friable bedded sandstone with pebbly strata. The formation is exposed in cross section to the east on the Waste Management property with yellow and red beds. The red bed where formed under semi-tropical forested conditions when rivers overflowed their channels depositing clayey deposits again and again. The Sespe Formation is rich in mammalian fossils. For example, an early primate fossil was found when grading for a parking area was done on the Waste Management property. The Sespe Formation has produced about 40 percent of the fossils found worldwide during the Oligocene Epoch. The fossils found are the result of sudden flooding when rivers broke over their banks into lowland areas - drowning animals, many of which lived underground.

The wetlands north of the freeway occurs because of alluvial deposits derived from those red clay-rich strata deposited when flood water broke through the stream banks. Those beds are generally referred to as "overbank strata." One is tempted to speculate that the wetland is the result of the blockage of movement of ground water due the construction of the freeway. However, a check of pre-freeway aerial photographs clearly shows that the wetlands have always been there.

PLANT LIFE: Most of what you will see on this hike are plants. Plants can be described as being associated by “plant communities.” These include riparian, i.e., wetlands in this case, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland, ruderal grasslands and chaparral. Many of the plant species found along the trail can occur in two or more of these communities.

With exception of the plants in the wetlands, these plant communities are the results of frequent fires and are “fire climax” plant associations. In this area the frequent fires were intentionally set by Chumash Indians over thousands of years as a way of husbanding the land. (Fires started by lightning are rare in Chumash territory.) Burning of plants on the land every two or three years encouraged the growth of plants that are favored following fires. The fires opened the landscape to “fire-follower” species that were favored by the Indians. Fires burnt off nearly all of the plants and accumulated the dead wood and other organic materials. The most important plant materials to the diets of the Indians were the seeds from native grasses. We know that following fires the Indians broadcasted grass seed over the charred landscape - thereby favoring their growth. We know from the report of Pedro Fages to the Viceroy in 1775 that the Chumash who broadcast that seed demarcated those fields and their families held the resulting seed harvest for themselves. The plants that had eatable bulbs, such as various mariposa lilies, blue dicks, and soap plant survived the fires and re-sprouted without the competition from other plants. Since grizzly bears favor areas of chaparral, burning off the land every few years helped keep the great bears away from the Indians.

In the year 2020 evidence of extensive plantings of native perennial plants was underway in Alamos Canyon. This included many coast live oaks. The replanting and careful selection of native species is intended to remediate the effects of 200 years of overgrazing by livestock.

Much of the Alamos Canyon open space is covered by ruderal, i.e., exotic grass annual species from the Mediterranean basin. Grasses such as ripgut and red bromes, hare barley, i.e, foxtails, wild oats, fountain grass, soft chess and several others have overwhelmed the perennial species. The non-native species produce more seed than the native species and they have arrived to the new world without the organisms that help control them in their homeland. As the Mediterranean species took over during the Nineteenth Century the Mission Indians and others harvested the exotic wild oat. Anthropologists learn from the Indians how they processed native grass seeds by observing how they processed the wild oats seeds. The only native grasses that I observe from the trail in 2020 were purple needle grass and giant rye. Many herbaceous plants also appear among the exotic grasses. The only purple needle grass that I observed in one patch, i.e., of a few thousand square feet just off the northwest shoulder of the trail. It was like looking back into the past, even though it was mixed in with non-native species.

Coastal sage scrub plants occur at lower elevations and on south facing slopes, while chaparral species occur on north facing slopes at lower elevations and also on some west and east facing slopes.

Plants as observed from the trail on my walkover were California pepper trees (native to Peru), coast live and scrub oaks, western sycamore, arroyo willow, mule fat, Chamise, lemonade berry, toyon, bladderpod, curly dock and wild rhubarb, Russian thistle, southern California locoweed, California sagebrush, chaparral yucca, wild cucumber, coast golden bush, horehound, purple, black and white sages, coyote brush, California and wand buckwheats, toyon, bush sunflower, Mediterranean, black and London rocket mustards, long-beaked and red-stemmed filagrees, tree tobacco (from Brazil), arroyo and bush lupines, wishbone bush, stinging nettle, bullrush, hoary-leaved and hairy-leaved ceanothus, wooly everlasting, hare barley, ripgut and red bromes, dodder (species *California*), bindweed, telegraph weed, turkey mullein, giant rye, purple needle grass, datura, wild oats, red berry, sugar bush, fern-leaf phacelia, western wallflower, and chalk liveforever.

ANIMAL LIFE: Animals that may be seen along the trail or evidence of their presence include: birds, such as turkey vultures, red-tailed and other hawks, golden eagles (now rare), great horned, barn and burrowing owls, California towhees, California quails, mourning doves, Anna's hummingbirds, common crows and ravens, white-crowned and English sparrows; reptiles, such as southern Pacific rattlesnakes, San Diego gopher snakes, and California king snakes, San Diego alligator lizards, and Great Basin fence lizards; and mammals, such as mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, bush rabbits, and desert cotton tails, California ground squirrels, Botta's pocket gophers, agile kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky wood rats, coyotes, gray foxes, ringtail cats (rarely observed because they are only active 2-3 hours a night), southern California weasels, badgers and striped skunks.

While mountain lions are present in the hills around Simi Valley, encounters are unlikely, but you should always be alert. It is best that you do not hike alone and that you keep small children close at hand. Rattlesnakes may be encountered — Stay on the trail and avoid them when they are encountered — Be observant and never try to handle them. Do not handle any wildlife, including bats, even if they appear to be injured or sick. Remember, you are visitors to their homes.

**Mike Kuhn,
Executive Chair,
Rancho Simi Trail Blazers**

*Please see **Trail Safety Tips** at this trail's main page for more info.*