

Big Sky Trail

History: The canyon was used by the Chumash Indians. One site was used for as long as several thousand years. The burnt remains of a ranch house from the Anglo-American period was present until grading for the now-present development begun.

Special interest occurred when the grading began for the southern-most subdivision on the eastern side of the canyon. The rough grading quickly uncovered the remains of a mastodon - an animal that looked like a low slung, i.e., (measuring about six feet at the shoulders) elephant. The mastodon is only distantly related to elephants. It was first known in Africa some 45 million years ago. They migrated into Europe and Asia about 20 million years ago, reaching North America about 15 million years ago. While evidence of mastodons has previously been found in California, that evidence normally consisted of the finding of one or two teeth at any one location. The Big Sky Ranch mastodon is about 85 percent complete and was fully articulated. It is now on display in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History in Exhibition Park. It appeared to have been buried in a fast-moving slump, so, it was not consumed by predators, with the bones being scattered. The label at the museum exhibit notes that its demise occurred more than 40,000 years ago. This simply indicates that no carbon 14 remained in its bones. At least one other bone-dating technique is available to determine its antiquity, however, the minimum date would seem to rule out the hand of man.

Geology: The bedrock geology is entirely within the Sespe Formation, which is a non-marine fluvial. It represents over-bank sediments deposited in a tropical forest floodplain. The deposits are made up of semi-friable bedded sandstone, light gray to pinkish in color, with interbeds of maroon-red and greenish micaceous claystone. It is these latter beds that resulted in the massive landslide or slump that entangled the mastodon. Major slumping was still occurring as late as the late -1970s. (Grading for the subdivision was done to first stabilize the Quaternary landslide.)

The Trail: The trail can begin at any of its many trailheads. Four of those occur where the trail is interrupted by roadways. At the south, the trail starts on the eastern side of Erringer Road north of the elaborate water pumping station and north of the fire station. The trail soon crosses the stream bed. From there one can continue to the top of the ridge to the east or continue on the trail northwesterly along the east side of the water course. The ridge route extends northerly all the way to Lost Canyons Drive. From there the other half of the full trail extends southerly back to the trailhead near the fire station.

Plant Life: Plants along the trail include those of a riparian, ruderal grassland, and coastal sage scrub plant associations. Most of the area includes plants that are native to the area but many are introduced species - those that become endemics and those that have been introduced intentionally. My survey was conducted on May 12, 2020. As encounter, doing the trail loop counter clockwise, the plants encountered were: mugwort, coast live and valley oaks, toyon, arroyo willow and at least two other willow species, purple needle grass, California sage brush, fountain grass, Fremont cottonwood, purple, black and white sages, white and yellow sweet clovers, blue elderberry, hairy-leaved ce-anothus, farewell-to-spring, coyote brush, scarlet pimpernel, deer weed, hare barley, red and ripgut bromes, Mediterranean mustard, yellow star thistle, sawtoothed golden bush, prickly sow thistle, wild oats, California buckwheat, golden top, silver puff, gourd, prickly lettuce, purple owl's clover, arroyo lupine, coast goldfield, bush mallow, narrow-leaved milkweed, turkey mullein, red-stem and long-beaked filarees, golden yarrow, yellow mariposa lily, dodder, bush sunflower, lanced-leaf live-forever, Indian paint-brush, coast prickly pear (a cactus), red bush monkey flower, yellow bush monkey flower, bush lupine, bind weed, wishbone bush, caterpillar phacelia, southern California locoweed, notable penstemon, and tamarisk.

Animal Life: Mammals that you may see or see the tracks of along the trail include brush and desert cottontail rabbits, California meadow mouse, dusky-footed woodrat, Botta's pocket gopher, California ground squirrel, agile kangaroo rat, striped skunk, bobcat, mountain lion, raccoon, southern California weasel, mule deer and various bats. Birds may include turkey vultures, red-tail and red-shouldered hawks, mockingbird, lesser goldfinch, Anna's hummingbird, barn, burrowing and great horned owls, common raven and crow, California towhee, meadowlark, California quail, and road runner. Reptiles include southern California rattlesnake, California kingsnake, coachwhip snake, California gopher snake - among many other snakes - and western fence lizard.

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.

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