

# Creekside Trail

**The Trail:** The trail begins at the eastern end of the Challenger Park parking lot, i.e., off of the southern end of First Street. From the parking lot take the dirt road ramp up the steep hillside. Follow the dirt road around the point of the hill. Then continue on the trail to the southeast and continue around until the trail gets to the convergence of Montgomery, Oak and Long Canyons. The trail is 1.3 miles long. From there you may return to the parking lot by going back on the trail or walking the sidewalk back to the entrance to Challenger Park. The entire trail is within the park.

**Geology:** The overall geomorphology of the area is quite interesting in that while the east-west trending Simi Hills have been uplifted over the last one to two million years, runoff from Long, Oak and Montgomery canyons have continued to erode and maintain it's route northward. The result is a water gap through the ridge. Imagining how this happened leads one to appreciate the concept of "geologic time" and how truly recent our arrival is on this earth.

The underlying bedrock is part of the Las Lajas Formation, which is of marine origin and consists of micaceous silty clay- and siltstone. It was laid down during the middle Eocene Period - roughly about 40 million years ago.

**Plants:** Plants in any area change not just over thousands of years but also over cycles of a few years. Plant communities not only evolve due to climate change but also due to wetter and drier periods of a few years. Prior to 16 to 18 thousand years ago plant life in our area was adapted to a prolonged cooler climate that we refer to as the ice age. The last of the ice age had pretty much ended about 11,000 years ago. Although temperature continued to increase until about 9,000 years ago. While this was going on - starting about 18,000 years ago - man made his appearance in the western hemisphere south of the continental ice sheet. With man came the use of fire to mold the environment to his needs.

The Chumash Indians set fires near settlements during the late summer and fall periods every two to three years to clear out dead material and to thin vegetative cover. This resulted in the maintenance of open grassland and oak woodlands. It encouraged the growth of "pioneer" plant species that were favored by the Indians and the ash from the fires renewed nutrients to the soil. This practice minimized the fuel load and kept the fires from being too destructive. It was common for the Indians to broadcast the seeds of native perennial grass following the fires. Individual families owned the harvest from the fields that they seeded. The fires were managed in such a way that the oak trees survived the fires. The acorns from the coast live oaks were a staple food for the Indians.

With the coming of the settlers from “New Spain” - starting with the two Portola Expeditions in 1769 and 1770 and especially with the De Anza Expedition in 1775, and then with the establishment of the San Fernando and San Buenaventura missions and the rancho system, laws were established outlawing the deliberate burning of vegetation by the Indians because the economy of the Spanish was dependent on livestock grazing. Today, we suppress wildfires, which are generally of human origin. So, our “natural” landscape is changing still.

The survey of plants along the trail was conducted on April 28, 2020. The entire area that the trail traverses had burned a little over one and a half years before. The plant cover was dense, especially on north-facing slopes. Flowers were abundant, indeed, overwhelming with their beauty and in their prime.

Plants are listed as they were observed. Once listed they are not listed again. The south-facing slopes of the main valley consists of ruderal grassland. The remainder of the area can generally be classified as coast sage scrub. The plants, by common names: purple needle-grass, ripgut and red bromes, black and Mediterranean mustards, purple nightshade, California everlasting, Italian, cobweb, yellow star and milk thistles, owls clover, laurel sumac, blue elderberry, purple, black and white sages, hare barley, heart-leaved penstemon, coyote brush, California sage brush, tree tobacco (toxic if eaten or smoked!), horehound, minor's lettuce, common fiddleneck, yellow monkey flower, wild celery, mule fat, wild oats, wild rhubarb, long-beaked filagree, bur clover, golden stars, morning glory, bindweed, arroyo and bicolored lupines, sow thistle, deer weed, coast live oak, sugar bush, California buckwheat, chaparral yucca, phacelia, chamise, narrow-leaved bedstraws, popcorn flower, bush sunflower, elegant clarkia, toyon, windmill pink, catalina mariposa lily, blue dicks, bush mallow, wild cucumber, vervain, eucrypta, bleeding heart, and a bright red poppy (many in one area - appear to be a species of poppy common in fields in northern Europe and the British Isles.)

**Animal Life:** Mammals that may be encountered or see the tracks of include cottontail and brush rabbits, Botta's pocket gopher, California ground squirrel, striped skunk, bobcat, mountain lion, raccoon, dusky-footed woodrat, agile kangaroo rat, southern California weasel, coyote, gray fox, mule deer, and various bats. Ring-tailed cats are present; however, they are only active two to three hours a day in the wee hours of the night. Birds may include the brown towhee, mockingbird, grasshopper sparrow, Anna's hummingbird, red-tailed hawk, cliff and barn swallows, turkey vultures, golden eagle (only one in the Simi Hills at the time of this writing), barn and burrowing owls, common raven and crow, California quail, and road runner, among many other birds. Reptiles may include western fence and San Diego alligator lizards, many different snakes, including southern Pacific rattlesnake, two-striped garter snake, San Diego gopher snake, California king snake, and striped racer.

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.*