

Eagle Rock Self-Guided Nature Trail

Welcome to the Eagle Rock Self Guided Nature Trail. This is a 1.8 mile trip to explore the flora, fauna and history of the Chorro Valley. This trail offers great views of Chorro Valley and surrounding hillsides. Take your time and enjoy your outdoor adventure.

If at the end of your adventure and you no longer want the brochure, please return to this guide to the brochure box when you are through so others may use it.

#1 - Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) - A member of the Cashew Family, poison oak flourishes throughout the Central Coast, especially in moist areas, eroded ravines and shady chaparral slopes.

Its form varies: it may be a climbing vine or a squat shrub. Its leaves are usually 1 to 4 inches long and in clusters of three. Small yellow green, star shaped flowers appear in clusters of new growth in spring when the leaves are vivid, glistening green. In late summer

and early fall the leaves change color to red. In winter the leaves fall off making it hard to identify. Most parts of the plants contain a yellowish oil (*urushiol*) which may cause a rash or blister when it is touched. There is an old saying "Leaves of three, let it be!"

#2 - Coyote Bush/California Sagebrush/Monkey Flower- Is California Sage really a sage? No, it is aromatic like the true sage, but it is a member of the sunflower family while true sages are in the mint family. Lightly press one of the leaves of the silvery plant and note the scent on your fingers. California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) is named because its odor is much like that of the herb family. Indians ate the seed and used the leaves to make a green dye for tattooing.

Monkey Flower (*Mimulus sp.*) is also found near



Poison Oak

sages. This evergreen plant has narrow dark green leaves and orange-yellow flowers in spring and summer. The young stems and leaves have been used as salad greens by Indians. The crushed raw leaves and stems have been used to heal burns and wounds.



Coyote Bush (*Baccharis pilularis*) is a common shrub of chaparral. It has small leathery leaves 1/2 to 1 inch long, with a hard covering, especially on the side

exposed to the direct sunshine. Whitish-yellowish flower clusters form at the ends of the branches and branchlets in leafy panicles. This hardy shrub is often the greenest plant to be seen during our long dry summers.

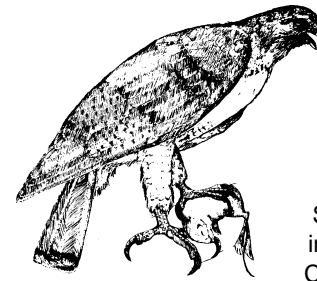
#3 - Signs of the Chumash Indians (Mortar Holes) - Do you see any remnants of the Chumash Indians? Look closely and you will find several bowl shaped holes in the rock.

The Indians ground acorns from Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) into meal using mortar holes. The meal was placed into a pit to leach out the bitter tannins by repeated dousings with water. The leached meal was then boiled with water in a watertight basket to which hot stones were added. The cooked mush was then eaten immediately or prepared into flat bread.

#4 - Trail Junction - At the trail junction you are standing at the start of a hillside grassland. The grasses are occasionally filled with a variety of wildflowers including Red Maids, Checker Bloom and Blue-eyed Grass. If you are short of time you can take the left trail 0.8 miles to the road. This will shorten your trip by 0.6 miles. However, you will miss some excellent views of the Morros and West Cuesta Ridge by not going to Eagle Rock.

#5 - Scrub Oaks (*Quercus dumosa*) - Scrub oak is found growing in the coastal mountains, usually in the dry chaparral regions. Due to the harsh conditions in which it is found, this oak grows as a shrub. The glossy green leaves are small, thick, and leathery. The Scrub Oak still produces acorns similar to larger oak trees.

#6 - Dairy Creek, Camp San Luis and West Cuesta Ridge Vistas - Take a short break here and enjoy the view to West Cuesta Ridge. Burned extensively in



1994 by the huge 41 Fire, the Los Padres National Forest is making a strong recovery. Many new seedlings have started to grow, including the Sergeant Cypress indigenous only to West Cuesta Ridge. The valley

in front of you is split by Dairy Creek, a year round stream which joins Chorro Creek then flows into the Morro Bay Estuary. Up until 1978, El Chorro Regional Park was part of Camp San Luis. Below is Camp San Luis the training grounds for the National Guard. From this vantage point you may see a Red-tailed Hawk or Turkey Vulture soaring overhead.

#7 - Eagle Rock Viewpoint - Welcome to Eagle Rock. You are now above the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden. From this vantage point you can see Camp San Luis, Cuesta College and the botanical area below. Across the Chorro Valley are the Morros, a chain of ancient volcanoes (plugs) formed about 20-25 million years ago and a part of the Franciscan Formation. The most visible Morros are Morro Rock (the farthest west), Black Hill, Cerro Cabrillo, Hollister Peak and directly in front of you, Cerro Romauldo, which rises above the Cuesta College campus. The connecting ridges between the plugs consist of various rock types from the Franciscan Formation. The most impressive is the narrow ridge of serpentinite between Hollister Peak and Cerro Romauldo. The serpentinite hills are conspicuously bare of vegetation, due to the lack of certain chemical elements in serpentinite soils. The serpentinite also harbors several rare plants, including the Obispo Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus obispoensis*), which has adapted to these unusual soils.

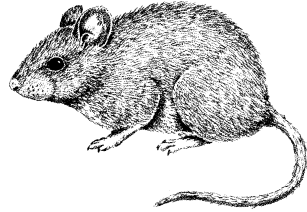
#8 - Oak Woodlands - These Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) characterize the woodlands of this area. As the name suggests, live oaks keep their leaves all year; note



the spiny rolled edges. Like other oaks, the Coast Live Oak was a major food source for the Chumash Indians. In early spring a golden glow may appear on these trees. If you take a branch covered with tiny catkins, you can see the yellow pollen fly on the breeze. This is the first step towards the tree making acorns.

#9 - Dusky-footed Woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes*)

Nests - As you look around you will see what seem to be piles of debris up to 6 feet high. These piles may be located on the ground or in trees. These are actually homes for the Woodrat. Female nests are located on the ground, while males nests are located in the branches of trees or shrubs. Woodrats are nocturnal and solitary, but the abundance of nests seem to indicate a good food supply. Woodrats subsist largely on acorns, oak leaves, and a variety of berries when in season. Woodrats may be distinguished from other similar sized rodents by their large ears and hairy tails. Woodrats in coastal scrub and chaparral endure the summer drought periods by drawing water from various species of prickly pear cactus.



#10 - Snowberries (*Symphoricarpos mollis*) - A member of the Honeysuckle family, a low trailing, much-branched shrub about 18 inches tall. Its leaves are broad oval to round, softly hairy on both sides, up to three-fourths of an inch long or larger, on sterile shoots. The flowers are small, bell-shaped, pinkish white and in pendant pairs in leaf axils or small clusters. Snowberries bloom from April to June and off season flowers are commonly found on these bushes. In late summer and fall the large conspicuous white berries appear.

Snowberry is also an important plant for wildlife; bees produce a white honey from the nectar and pollen, animals eat the berries and birds use the bushes for shelter.



#11 - Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spachthacea*) - Hummingbird Sage has red flowers which make it popular with its feathered friend, the hummingbird. The hummingbird sticks its long narrow beak deep into the red flowers to drink its nectar. This large-leaved, coarse-foliaged plant associates with black sage and bush monkey flowers in the coastal scrub. This sage may also be found under trees in foothill woodlands as seen here. Hummingbird sage reproduces using both ground runners and seeds. With light monthly watering this plant will continue to flower almost all year round.

#12 - El Chorro Regional Park Vista Point - Take a short break here and enjoy the view of El Chorro Regional Park. Mule deer (*Odocoileus heminous*), common in the park, are frequently seen in the valley in early morning and evening. The Chumash hunted them with bows and arrows, stalking them from downwind until close enough to shoot. Deer provided meat to eat, bones for needles and tools, sinews for bow strings, and fur for clothing and blankets. No part of the deer was wasted.

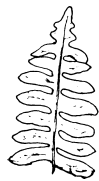


Look closely on the ground; you will undoubtedly see deer tracks along the trail.

#13 - Ferns - Under the shady trees you will find several species of ferns. Indians ate the juicy and tender young shoots of a number of ferns. They also ate underground runners and utilized the shiny black stems of some species in basket making.

Like bunch grasses, ferns have extensive root systems which help stabilize soil. These same root systems allow them to survive California's hot dry summer.

In winter and spring, look for the delicate and lacy maiden hair fern (*Adiantum jordanii*) along sections of the trail. Other species here include the California polypody on rock faces, wood ferns growing in round clusters on the ground, and the small silverback fern which has yellowish powder on the underside of its new leaves.



#14 - Intermittent Streams - Intermittent streams are created wherever there is enough seasonal moisture to cause surface water to flow. These streams provide water for wildlife and a variety of vegetation. Animals come here to drink under the cover of vegetation to avoid being seen by predators. These animal may be seen by the quiet and observant hiker, especially at dusk or early in the morning.

#15 - Lichens - These two large rocks are almost completely covered by lichens. A lichen is an association of a fungus and an alga. A common gray lichen on these rocks has a black margin and one can see where adjacent lichens are encroaching on one another as they grow, producing a jigsaw puzzle effect. Other lichens on the rocks are orange, yellow, and gray green. Saucer-like structures with brown centers which bear fungal spores are on some of the gray-green lichens. Look for these reproductive structures on lichens of rocks to the south of the path between here and the road.

The dry exposed surface of a rock is an inhospitable place. Lichens which live there often grow less than 1/50th inch per year.

#16 - Dairy Creek as a year round creek and the Sycamores - Our last stop is located along the paved road at the start of the Three Bridges Trail.

Sycamores are one of our most handsome native trees, with their molted greenish white bark and large angular branches. When they leaf out in mid to late spring, they are often impacted by a fungal blight, anthracnose, that kills these first young leaves. However, another leafing out period ensues and survives to manufacture nourishment in the summer sun. Remember this when you see these withered young leaves in town. Be patient, these hardy deciduous natives will survive.

Sycamores also play a part in nature by providing food storage for the acorn woodpecker. Look for the myriad of holes on the back side of the sycamore trees. If you look closely, you might find holes with acorns still in them.



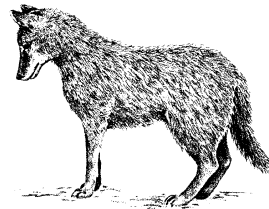
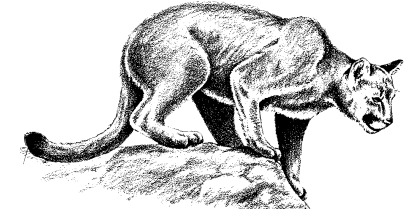
Flowers found along the Eagle Rock Self-Guided Nature Trail

Arroyo Willow (*Salix lasiolepis*)
 Black Nightshade (*Solanum nodiflorum*)
 Black Sage (*Salvia mellifera*)
 Blue Dicks (*Dichelostemma pulchella*)
 Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*)
 California Buttercups (*Ranunculus californicus*)
 California Hedge Nettle (*Stachys bullata*)
 California Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*)
 California Peony (*Paeonia californica*)
 California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)
 California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*)
 Checker Mallow (*Sidalcea malvaeflora*)
 Common Yarrow (*Achillea spp.*)
 Fairy Lantern, Globe Lily (*Calochortus albus*)
 Filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*)
 Golden Yarrow (*Eriophyllum spp.*)
 Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathacea*)
 Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja spp.*)
 Indian Pink (*Silene spp.*)
 Johnny Jump Ups, Yellow Violet (*Viola pedunculata*)
 Owls Clover (*Orthocarpus purpurascens*)
 Meadow Lupine (*Lupinus ssp.*)
 Milk Maids (*Dentaria californica*)
 Mustard (*Brassica spp.*)
 Pearly Everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)
 Plantain (*Plantago spp.*)
 Popcorn Flower (*Plagiobothrys nothofulvus*)
 Purple Nightshade (*Solanum xanti*)
 Footsteps of Spring (*Sanicula arctopoides*)
 Scarlet Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*)
 Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon spp.*)
 Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*)
 Soap Plant (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*)
 Star Lily (*Zigadenus fremontii*)
 Sticky Monkey Flower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*)
 Vetch (*Vicia gigantea*)
 Wild Cucumber (*Marah fabaceus*)
 Wild Rose (*Rosa californica*)
 Yerba Buena (*Satureja douglasii*)

Eagle Rock

Self-Guided Nature Trail

El Chorro Regional Park



Prepared for:
 The San Luis Obispo County
 Parks and Open Space

Prepared by:
 The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club
 P.O. Box 15755
 San Luis Obispo CA 93406



Printed on Recycled paper