Natural Bridges Trail (23-July-2011)

Distance: 0.7 mile

Difficulty: Moderate

Start Elevation: 1490'
Total Elevation Gain: 280'

Trailhead: 38 3' 7.40"N 120 28' 17.05"

Directions: Parking and the trailhead are located on Parrotts Ferry Rd 3.7 mi south of Hwy 4 @ Vallecito and 6 miles north of Columbia. An old retired segment of Parrotts Ferry Rd that is 0.2 mi long serves as a parking lot. There is a vault toilets at this parking lot, but no drinking water.

Description: The trailhead is on the west side of the parking lot near Parrotts Ferry Rd. This hike is short and might be considered easy for most, but there are a few short steep segments. After passing through the "wiggle gate" the trail descends a short distance along the old fill slope of the road above where the footing is a bit of a challenge. It then crosses a small drainage and follows an historic road. The final descent is over a footpath that is steep and partially stepped section. The footpath ends at the downstream outlet of a Natural Bridge.

Notice the spur trail at the monument describing the Bridge. This spur leads over the top of the Bridge to a point where Coyote Creek flows into the cavern. Getting down to the creek requires some rock scrambling. On warm days, a swim into and through the cavern is a magical experience.

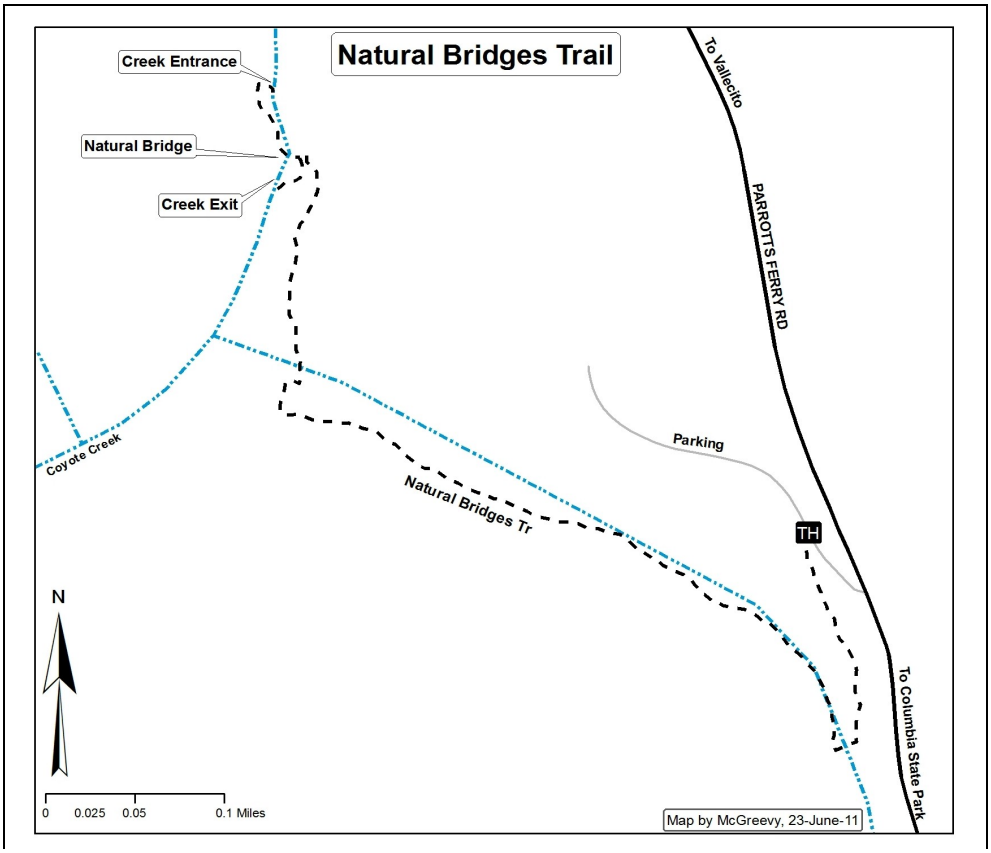
There are a half dozen picnic tables located along the trail, especially the segment that approaches the creek.

The spring wildflowers can be diverse and quite spectacular in the area around Natural Bridges.

Elevation Change (ft)

Under Construction

Distance (mi)



Did You Know? -

Cave formation begins when rainwater absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Rain water with carbon dioxide becomes acidic. As rainwater seeps through the soil it absorbs more carbon dioxide produced by dead, decaying plants. This changes the ground water to a weak form of carbonic acid:

$H_2O + CO_2 = H_2CO_3$

As the carbonic acid travels down through the ground, it comes to solid rock. When the rock is limestone or dolomite, caves can form by chemical erosion. The carbonic acid dissolves the calcium carbonate ($CaCO_3$) in the limestone to form a cavity that slowly enlarges. Eventually, water starts to flow and erode. Physical erosion washes away rock and sand. Over hundreds of thousands of years or even millions of years, a cave with an underground stream is formed.

References:
BOR, Natural Bridges Trail

James M. Hutchings wrote a wonderful description of the Natural Bridges area in 1862.

Emergencies: 911
Area Manager: Bureau of Reclamation
Phone: (209) 536-9543
Nearby Medical Facilities:
Angels Camp Prompt Care (8AM-6PM daily)
23 N. Main St. in the Frog Jump Plaza
(209) 736-9130
Family Medical Center (9AM-5:30PM daily)
Angels Towne Center
222 S. Main St., Angels Camp, CA
(209) 736-0813

Questions & Suggestions:
CalaverasOutside@gmail.com

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