Low Gap Park/City View Trail Nature Hike

History of Low Gap Park and City View Trail.

Low Gap Park: This 80-acre parcel of land has had several uses over the years. Until 1955, the City of Ukiah used a portion of the land for the City dump. In 1955, topsoil from what is now the archery range was pushed over the dumpsite to seal it off. Prior to its use as a City dump, there was a lumber mill and millworkers' housing on the site. Remnants of both these former uses can still be found in certain areas of the park.

In 1964, when one of the earliest State Park Bond acts was passed, a decision was made by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors to use the funds to develop the Low Gap property into a regional County park. The County Parks Department was created in 1973 and it became the Park Director's first duty to proceed with the Low Gap project.

The City View Trail

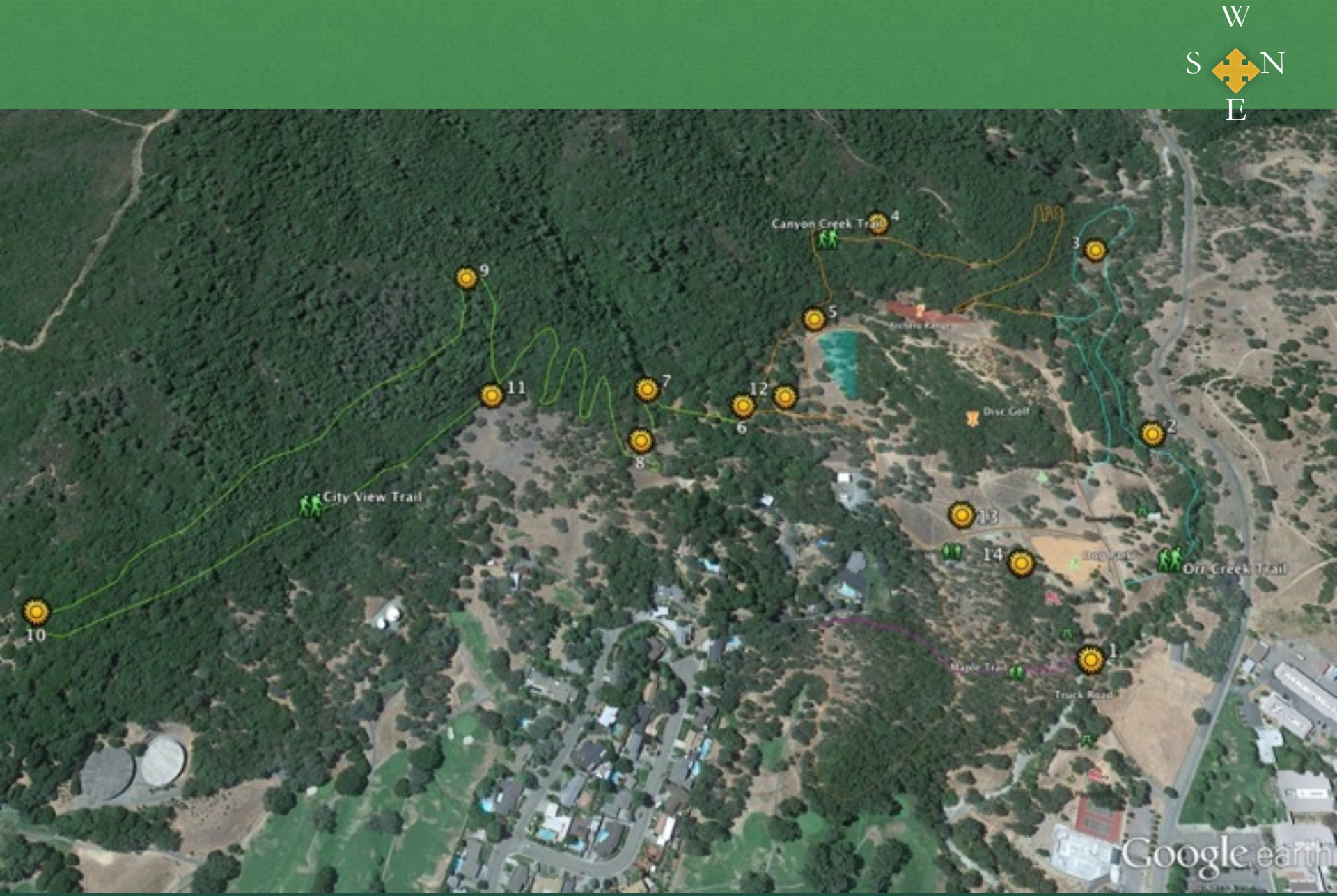
was built in 2008 as a collaboration between the City of Ukiah, Ukiah Valley Trail Group and the Paths, Open Space and Creeks Commission. It was funded by a Tobacco Settlement grant and donations from community members. Many community volunteers worked to build the trail and continue to maintain the trail. Please honor the work of these volunteers by enjoying and respecting the trail, trail users and the natural environment.

Low Gap/City View Nature Hike

This hike is approximately 4 miles long and includes 3 adjoining trails. The 14 numbered stops assume that you will start the hike near the Dog Park at Orr Creek Trail, continue on Canyon Creek Trail to City View Trail and return on the road west of the Dog Park. The hike passes through remarkably different habitats and diverse vegetation considering the small area it traverses.

Please stay on the trail and respect property boundaries. Shortcuts and "use" trails destroy vegetation and may cause erosion. Vegetation is food and shelter for wildlife. Please leave wildflowers so that they can reseed and be enjoyed for generations to come. Keep dogs on leash and under control. Pick up after yourself and your pet. There is no bathroom or water available out on the trails.

Firecracker flower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Google earth

1. Orr Creek

The large wooden bridge crossing the flowing waters of Orr Creek is a reminder that we are entering a park: a place where the human and the natural come together.

Orr Creek is home to steelhead trout, which are the anadromous form of rainbow trout. Mysteriously, only some of the young trout decide to travel down the river to the ocean where they mature, returning to their birth river to spawn two or three years later. Others stay in the creek as rainbow trout. Unlike most Pacific salmon, steelhead can make this trip several times before they die.

As you approach the bridge, you will see a large boulder on your right. This is graywacke, a kind of sandstone formed from submarine avalanches off the coast millions of years ago. It was moved here as the Pacific plate and the North American Plate crunched together.

Look up and down the creek and you will find lush riparian vegetation: ash, willow, and service-berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia)* are some of the natives that line the bank. These plants provide shade, food, and shelter for the fish.

2. Orr Creek Trail

In springtime many of the plants along the creek are in bloom, such as red larkspur (*Delphinium nudicaule),* California buttercup (*Ranunculus occidentalis),* and shooting stars (*Primula hendersonii).* Observe carefully and you may see a silk tassel tree (*Garrya flavescens)* on the creek side of the trail.

Look for a large blue grey rock outcrop on your left. This blue schist is a metamorphic rock that is fairly common in Mendocino County. While it weathers a bit grey blue, fresh breaks reveal a shimmering blue surface. Pacific stonecrop (*Sedum spathulifolium)* seems to grow right out of the rock face. It is embellished with yellow flowers in the spring.

3. Orr Creek Meadow

This wet meadow has a large population of native grasses, reeds and sedges. Most of California's grasslands are now exotic (not native Californian) annual grasses. Exotic plants crowd out the native California plants that have evolved with the local insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. Exotic plants often do well because nothing likes to eat them or parasitize them. In general, they do not provide as good quality shelter and food as California native plants. This meadow may have been able to survive due to wet conditions that favor native plants over non natives.

Some of the interesting plants found here are yampah (*Perideridia kelloggii*) and camas (*Camassia* sp.) Native people used the roots of these plants for food. This is also a place to find annual plants that love moisture soils such as meadowfoam (*Limnanthes douglasii)*, blue larkspur (*Delphinium* sp.), and native clovers (*Trifolium* spp.*)*

Camas

4. Chaparral (near overlook bench)

Chaparral is a term used to describe dense thickets of shrubs. Chaparral plants are adapted to hot, dry conditions and are found in Mediterranean climates. Chaparral plants have adapted to fire and many of the plants have seeds that will lie dormant until germination is stimulated by fire.

Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*) is a very common chaparral plant. There are at least 3 types of manzanita in the park including giant manzanita (*A. manzanita ssp. manzanita*) and whiteleaf manzanita (*A. viscida*.) Some other common chaparral plants are chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), wild lilac (*Ceanothus thrysiflorus)*, and toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*).

Many chaparral plants have sclerophyllous leaves. This means the leaves are evergreen, hard, thick, leathery and usually small. These leaf characteristics help the plants conserve water. Chaparral is very hard for humans to hike through but is a haven for many birds, reptiles and mammals who enjoy the shelter and abundant seeds and berries.

5. Serpentine and Chert (Rock Stop off short cut trail to Frisbee golf course and truck road.)

A little trail will be on your left as you come down the hill approximately 1/3 mile after leaving the bench in the chaparral.

The trail comes out at golf basket #7 which is located in serpentine. This serpentine rock has a waxy, greenish-grey appearance (like a serpent.) Serpentine, our California state rock, has a low calcium to magnesium ratio. The shallow soils are low in essential plant nutrients such as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus and tend to have high concentrations of heavy metals. Some plants have adapted to serpentine so well that they are only found on those soils. Most non-native plants cannot live in serpentine soils, so some of the most interesting and diverse remnants of native California plant communities can be found on serpentine.

Head uphill, past tee 8 and through the blue oaks to the top of the knoll where there is a bench. The large blocks of rock here are chert. It may be red, green or white. It may display bedding planes, reflecting their original deposition as deep marine sediment layers. Chert is very common in our area.

Chert

Serpentine

6. Basalt Outcrop

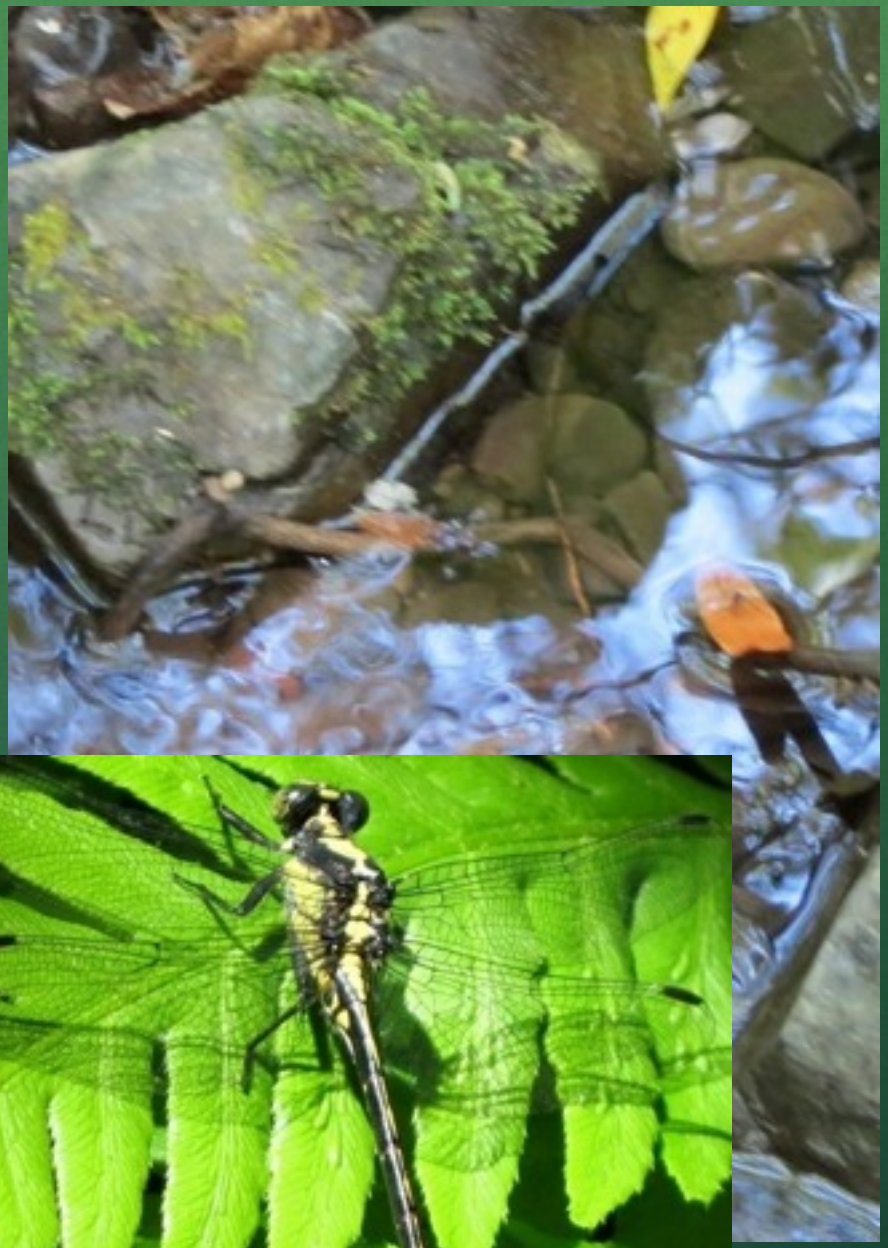
Just up the trail from the vernal pool, the beginning of City View Trail passes through an outcrop of basalt. Basalt is a dense, tightly grained igneous rock that may be spewed onto the earth from volcanos or, as in this case, released under the ocean and thrust above ground millions of years ago as the Pacific Plate was pushed under the North American Plate, and the oceanic rocks were scraped off, jumbled around with other chunks of rocks (called the Franciscan Melange) and pushed to the surface.

Take a moment and look around and you will see a faster, different kind of transition under way - an oak woodland slowly giving way to a Douglas fir dominated forest. Next to the old black oaks, live oaks and madrone, you will see a large Douglas fir and many smaller Douglas firs spread throughout the woodland. These trees grow much faster and much taller than the hardwoods. Within a couple of decades they will "shade out" the oaks, creating a conifer forest.

7. Riparian Area

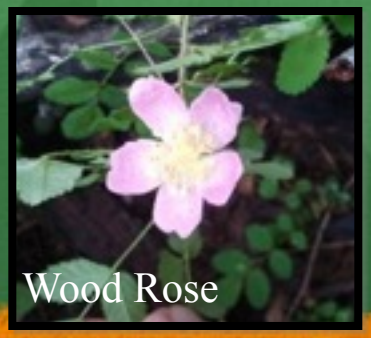
The riparian vegetation at the stream crossing includes willow (*Salix sp.*), non-native Himalayan blackberry, native California blackberry, mugwort (*Artemisia douglasiana*), California bay laurel (*Umbellularia californica*) and elk clover (*Aralia californica*).

Upstream you will see horse tail (*Equisetum* sp.), giant chain ferns (*Woodwardia fimbriata*) and other vegetation that thrives in the shady and damp environment. The small pools and seeps in the rock canyon provide water for wildlife, insects and amphibians. On the downstream side of the foot bridge the terrain becomes more gentle and the stream bed has small gravel into which the water disappears in the summer months. The riparian tree habitat is a haven for birds, butterflies, and insects.



8. City View Meadow

This meadow is very different from the meadow by Orr Creek. It is much dryer. It also has more serpentine influence. The dominant native bunch grass is Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), a grass that tends to have a bluish tinge and is about 2 feet tall. It dries out and becomes dormant in the summer. The wildflowers here are able to poke up between the clumps of grass. This is a hint of what our beautiful California meadows were once like. In springtime, you may find blue-eyed marys (*Collinsia sparsifolia*), cream cups (*Platystemon californicus*), scythe leave onions (*Allium falcifolium*), blue dicks (*Dichelostemma capitatum*) and checker bloom (*Sidalcea malviflora*.) During late spring, firecracker flowers (*Dichelostemma ida-maia*) appear around the wooded edges of the meadow. The large oak in the meadow is a white oak, likely a hybrid.


Wood Rose

9. Forest of the North and East facing slopes


California Nutmeg

The North facing terrain is steep with red clay top soil over the underlying sandstone rock formation. The plant community has transitioned from a mixed oak woodland to a hardwood/conifer forest. The forest lets very little light pass through the canopy to the soil, thus there is very little vegetation growing on the forest floor. In the winter you can find mushrooms in the leaves of the forest. Mycorrrhizal fungi (mushrooms) have a symbiotic relationship with the roots of the trees in the forest.

This plant community includes Douglas fir (*Psuedotsuga menziesii*), redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), California nutmeg (*Torreya californica*), tan oak (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*), madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), interior live oak (*Quercus wislizeni*), and canyon live oak (*Q. chrysolepsis*). The forest canopy is alive with many birds and squirrels that call this habitat home.

On the hike to stop 10 observe how the tree species change depending on the exposure to the sun.


Black Oak


Tan Oak


Canyon Oak

10. Oak Woodland/Chaparral

On the hike from Stop 9, the hardwood/conifer forest transitioned to primarily oak woodland. At stop 10 we are on a southeast-facing ridge at the boundary between an oak woodland and the chaparral plant community. There is still very little vegetation on the forest floor except within a small opening which contains grass. The soil formation is still red clay with shallow sandstone rock beneath the topsoil.

As you return to the beginning of the loop trail, you will pass wonderful stands of large bunchgrass, California fescue (Festuca californica), growing under the oaks.

11. Serpentine Knoll (Bench under madrone tree)

As you look around this wonderful spot, there is much to capture your attention besides the great views. You are at the edge of a serpentine area. If you look at the area immediately to the east and extending just west of the trail, you can see differences in vegetation. Where the serpentine influence is strongest, the vegetation is sparse. (See stop 5 for description of serpentine.) Because few exotics are adapted to serpentine soils, this area is a haven for many California native plants. Some of the plants seen here are giant squirreltail grass (*Elymus multisetus*), California melic grass (*Melica Californica*), and Idaho fescue. There is a wonderful wildflower display in spring that includes goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*), Clarkia, and Douglas violets (*Viola douglasii*.)

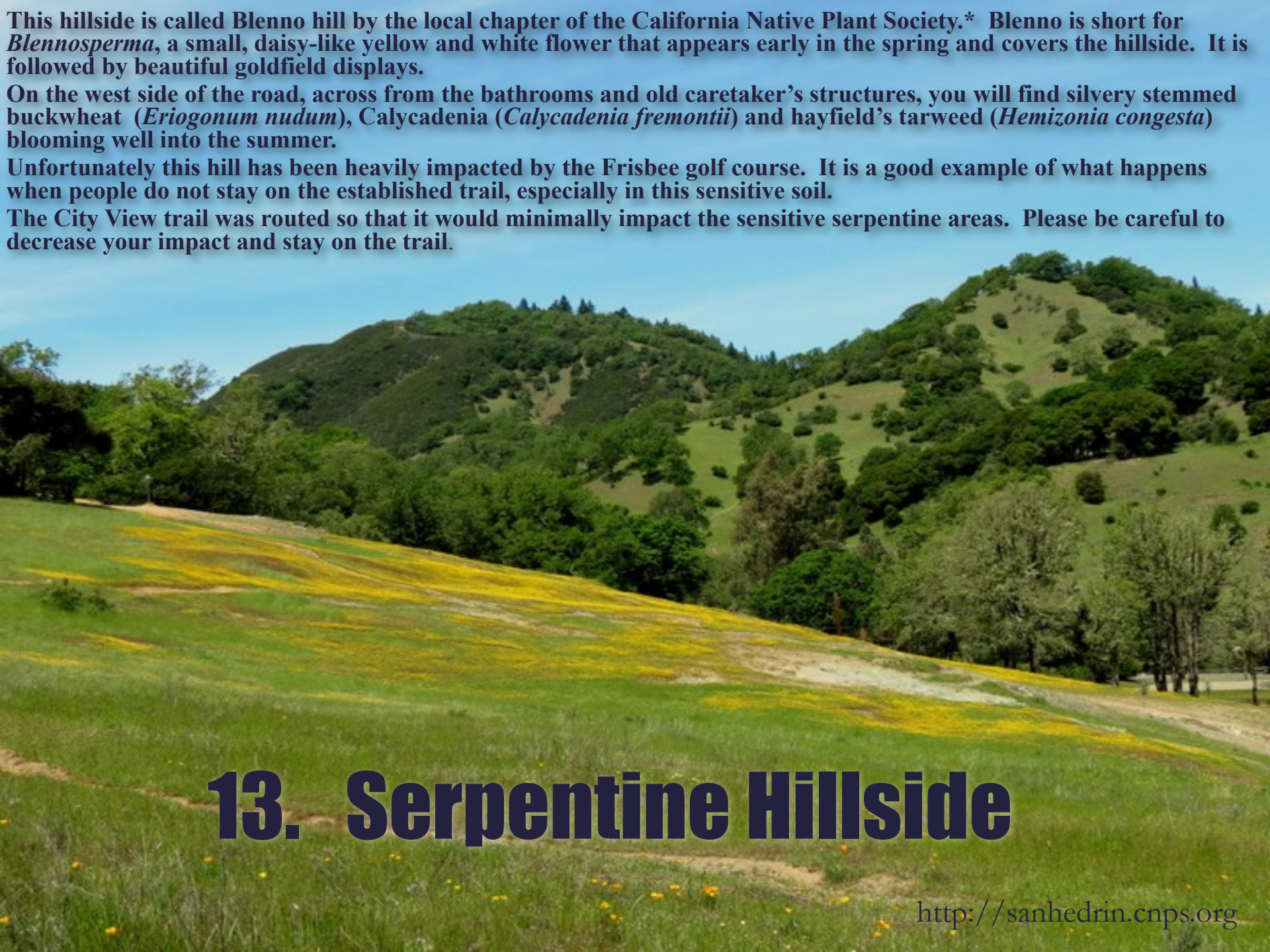
Viola douglasii

12. Vernal Pool

Vernal pools are miniature ecosystems: natural depressions covered by shallow water for variable periods from winter to spring, they are typically dry for most of summer and fall. A diverse array of plants and animals adapted to a waterlogged spring followed by a parched summer have evolved that thrive under these conditions. Many of these are native species endemic to vernal pools or related wetland habitat. Because of the extreme environment there are relatively few introduced species that can compete with the natives.* Some vernal pool plants found here are Lobb's aquatic buttercup (*Ranunculus lobbii*), Bolander's water-starwort (*Callitriche heterophylla var. bolanderi*) and semaphoregrass (*Pleuropogon californicus*).

*http://cnps.org/cnps/nativeplants/gallery/fristrom2/

Vernal pool during the dry spring of 2013.



This hillside is called Blenno hill by the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society.* Blenno is short for *Blennosperma*, a small, daisy-like yellow and white flower that appears early in the spring and covers the hillside. It is followed by beautiful goldfield displays.

On the west side of the road, across from the bathrooms and old caretaker's structures, you will find silvery stemmed buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum*), Calycadenia (*Calycadenia fremontii*) and hayfield's tarweed (*Hemizonia congesta*) blooming well into the summer.

Unfortunately this hill has been heavily impacted by the Frisbee golf course. It is a good example of what happens when people do not stay on the established trail, especially in this sensitive soil.

The City View trail was routed so that it would minimally impact the sensitive serpentine areas. Please be careful to decrease your impact and stay on the trail.

13. Serpentine Hillside

http://sanhedrin.cnps.org

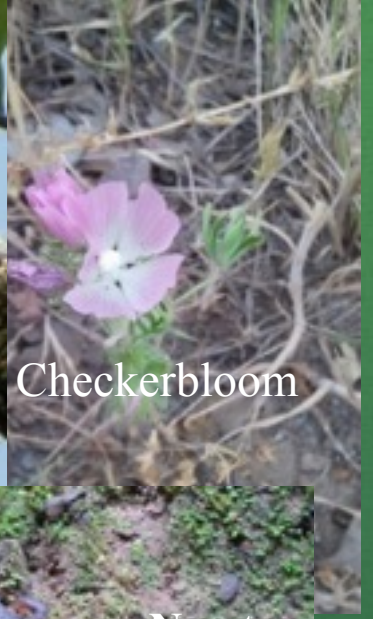
14. Blue Oak Woodland

The blue oak woodland is different than the mixed hardwood forest we saw earlier. The drier, hotter south and west slopes are dominated by the blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*). In the late afternoon, the fading light accents the blue green color. Sit for a few minutes and perhaps you will see Western Bluebirds or an Acorn Woodpecker flashing through the trees. In springtime, you may find blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), blue dicks (*Dichelostemma capitatum*) and blue wild rye (*Elymus glaucus*.)


Mariposa Lily


Milkwort


Anna's Hummingbird


Checkerbloom


Madrone


Diogenes Lantern


Newt


Yerba Buena

California Naturalist Class Capstone Project Spring 2013

Bob Neale

Tom Hunt

Andrea Davis

Thank you to our friends Kerry Heise, Gail Johnson and Steve Cardimona.

All photos are from Low Gap Park or City View Trail


Indian Pink


Licorice (polypody) and Maidenhair ferns


Wild Iris

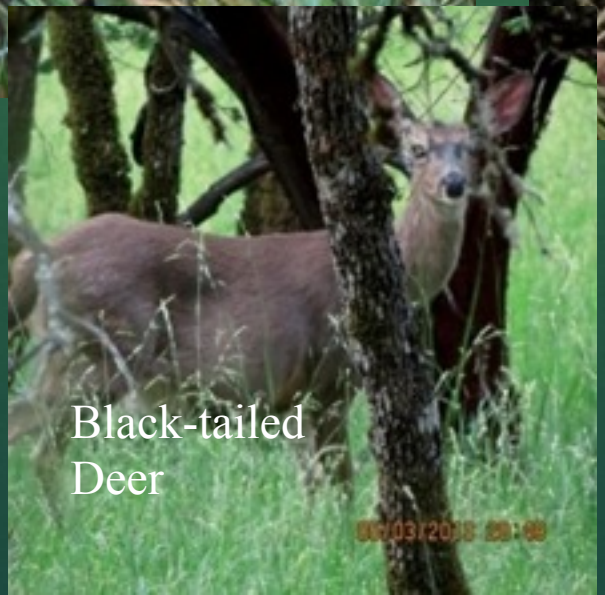

California Nutmeg


Jackrabbit


Grey Mule Ears


Stonecrop


Blue dicks


Black-tailed Deer


Poison Oak