

Keep walking until you come out of the woodlands into the more open area. Before the fire, this was an area dominated by thick shrubs (bushes), a plant community called chaparral. The shrubs were so tall and dense that



you could not see through them. The tallest skeletons that you see here now are manzanitas that do not resprout from the base; these manzanitas can only return slowly from seeds that fell before the fire. It's hard to see the baby manzanitas; you need to look closely, for many of them are growing, nestled beneath other plants.



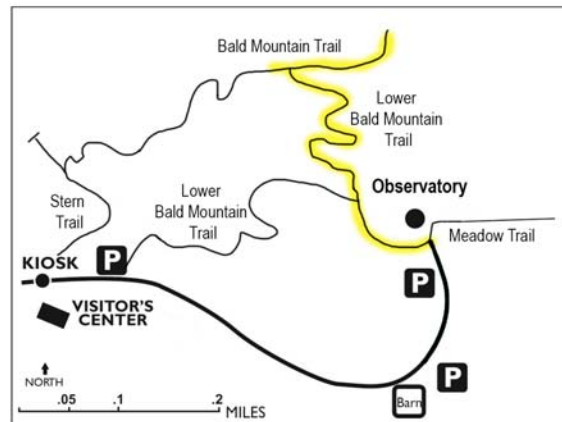
Some plants that are sprouting around the bases of the manzanita skeletons are toyon, a shrub with broad flat leaves with small toothy edges. Come back in December and you will see them bursting with bright red berries that birds love to eat. Other plants are the lacy shrub called chamise. One can imagine how this area will regrow with lots of large shrubs.

Climb to the top of the path where it meets the paved fire road. You may wish to sit and rest on the newly constructed bench, made from wood reclaimed after the fire.



Walk to the north, downhill, until you reach the marker on the right side of the road. Look to your right and you will see skeletons of tall straight trunks. These are Douglas fir trees. You will see an abundance of green plants growing in this now sunny area, once shady from the canopy of these trees. But none of this green comes from sprouts growing from the charred trees. Young Douglas firs have no defenses against fire, except their height, so young trees perish in a fire.

For the last part of our walk, turn around and walk uphill on the fire road. Walk past the bench until the road curves to your left. On the hillside to your left you will see more skeletons of manzanitas. During the spring after the 2017 fires, this hillside was covered by thousands of Whispering Bells, a small plant with yellow bell-shaped flowers. They were last seen here after the wildfires in 1964. The seeds of this "fire follower" wait patiently for years until a fire brings them to life again. They are a fleeting reminder of the gifts that fire can bring, and how Mother Nature needs fire to restore the biodiversity that is meant to be.



Fire Recovery Walk



This self-guided walk, begins at the Observatory, and highlights how the land has recovered, and even thrived, after the 2017 wildfires.

The fires that swept through our state from Mendocino to Sonoma Valley in 2017 were devastating to many of us who lost our homes or loved ones, as well as to anyone who had to face the possibility of loss .

Nature, on the other hand, does not see fire in the same way. About 80% of Sugarloaf Ridge State Park burned in 2017. The blackened forest, chaparral, and grasslands may look dead but for most native species, a fire is only the beginning of a new cycle of life.

This walk shows how nature benefits from fire, how the life and biodiversity of the forest, chaparral, and grasslands is strengthened through fire.

Native Americans know the value of fire and historically used it to revitalize the land. Perhaps in time, we will discover how better to integrate fire into our 21st century lives.



When finished, continue exploring, or retrace your steps.

The area surrounding the Robert Ferguson Observatory was used by CalFire as a staging area for trucks and equipment. Without their presence, it surely would have been destroyed. It is a fitting place to begin our hike!



Facing the Observatory, look to your left, and you will see a path leading up a beautiful grassy meadow. This is Lower Bald Mountain Trail. Walk up the hill, and look to your right and left as you go.

Do you see any evidence of fire on either side? The fire came through this area, but mostly kept to the right of the trail. Why do you think this could be? Do you see a possible line where water could have caused the ground to be harder to



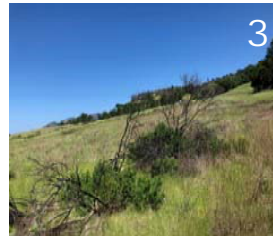
burn? Take note of how the wind is blowing. Wind can have a major impact on the direction a fire travels. Walk to the tree along the path (photo #1 above), and turn around to look back. Do you see anything that could be an artifact from the wildfire such as charred trees, darkened bushes on the hillside, patches of land where nothing is growing at all? Impacts from wildfire are not always presented in the way we expect.

As you walk past the tree, look for trees that have evidence of fire damage. Now look closer: do you see any branches coming up from the base of the trees, or along the trunk or branches? This is new life sprouting from the unlikely host of a fire damaged tree.

Do you see the plants growing from the base of the trees on photos #2 and #5? The ash from the fire provides nutrients on and under the ground, which allows new life to burst forth. You will frequently see species (kinds) of plants and trees growing and thriving that weren't here before the fire. Some species have seeds that only open after extreme heat. They need fire to begin their growth.

At the intersection of Lower Bald Mt Trail, look to your left. You'll see skeletons of manzanitas with coyote bushes sprouting around their bases (photo #2). Manzanitas have thin bark. As a result, they often perish in fires, even low temperature fires. Most manzanita species in this region don't have the capacity to re-sprout, so other sun loving plants grow from their seeds that had settled close to the manzanita.

Entering the woodlands, look around. See the oaks that have burned. Oaks have thick bark and are able to survive fire, even if much of their trunk is charred. After fire, they quickly send out shoots and leaves from their limbs or even their trunks. Among the oaks are bay trees. Bays often survive fire even if their above-ground parts burn. You can see how they recover by sprouting from the base of their trunks. Many young sprouts will be vying for space, light, and water in the coming years. Only a few will survive this competition.



You can recognize madrones by their smooth orange bark. Madrones can also look like they're dead after a fire if they are charred and burned. But look again. Up and down the tree, you may see fresh sprouts growing from the limbs or base of the trunk.



This hillside has changed since the fires. Many of the plants growing close to the ground were not here before the fire because the overhead canopy of tall shrubs shaded the ground, depriving shorter plants of light. Once the canopy, or "overstory," was burned away, different species of plants went wild with growth. Note the 3 oak leaves (photo #6). The one on the far left is a typical-sized oak leaf. The larger two are evidence of a sun-rich growth boom, during which the plants living here grew as big and as fast as possible, soaking up the light and nutrients.



As you climb higher on the path through the oaks, bays, and madrones, look at the retaining walls. One on your left has beautiful "furry" bark on the outside of the wall (photo #7). This is redwood from Park trees that burned in the fires, reclaimed to construct this wall.

