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14. The western bracken ferns you see to the left are hardy plants that can tolerate a wide range of climates. Although they are growing in this shady patch of grass, they prefer sunlight and exposed land.

15. From this point, you can enjoy a panoramic view of Sugarloaf Ridge. Much of this ridge originated from volcanic activity. The cliffs are dangerous to climb. The various shades of green on the ridge react the many different plant species populating the mountainside.

16. If you look at the tree to the right of the trail, you can see a stump of the California bay laurel on the left. The small shoots sprouting from the stump indicate that the laurel is re-sprouting and will grow new branches in the future.

17. Look closely amongst the plants along the banks and you can see a native blackberry plant. The more widely known, tasty Himalayan blackberry plant is an invasive species introduced from Europe. The native blackberry grows flexible bristles instead of the sharp thorns of the Himalayan blackberry.



Sugarloaf Ridge State Park

Creekside Nature Trail

Trail brochure updated in 2013/2014 by Adam Sisk of Troop 431, Rohnert Park as part of his Eagle Scout project to improve the Nature Trail. He was assisted by the Staff of the Sonoma Ecology Center and Tom Whitworth.

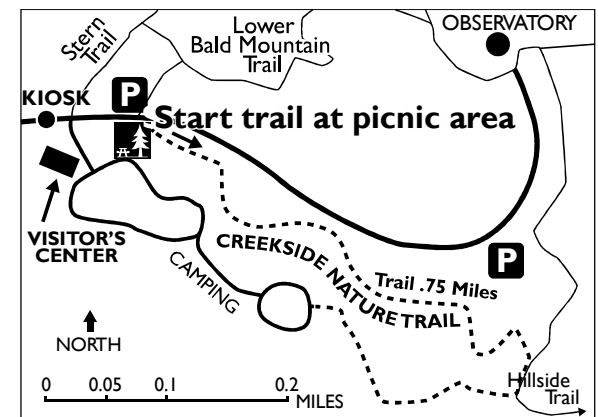
This trail provides a great opportunity to view many of the park's plants, wildlife, and other natural features. The park staff will be happy to satisfy your curiosity about anything concerning the trail, including plant and animal identification.

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park Operated by Team Sugarloaf



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The trail is an easy three-quarter mile walk that takes less than an hour to walk. The numbered posts along the trail correspond to numbered paragraphs in this brochure describing features along the path. The trail begins at the picnic area near the day-use parking lot and ends at the campground. Enjoy your walk!



1. Welcome to the Creekside Nature Trail. If you look closely at the California bay tree on your right, also called California bay laurel, you can see black spots like little squares on some of the leaves. These spots are a sign of Sudden Oak Death infection. Bay trees carry the infection, but do not seem to be harmed by it. Perhaps Sudden Oak Death killed the coast live oak whose stump you can see to your left.

2. During the rainy season, the creek rises and washes soil from the banks downstream. The creek winds from one side of the channel to the other and small beaches form from the deposited soil. These beaches become more exposed when the creek dries up in the summer.

3. This Douglas fir beside the trail has grown tall over the years and is thriving. Although Douglas firs are native to California, meaning that they have grown here since before Europeans arrived, some ecologists want to reduce their numbers, because in the absence of regular fires to open up the forest, they tend to take over the forest, depriving other trees of resources.

4. The trees along the ridge to your left are coast live oaks. Their acorns were essential to the Wappo Indians; who used them to make bread, soup, and cakes after pounding them into meal and leaching the meal to remove the tannic acid. The Wappo lived in this area during the summer, collecting acorns and hunting.

5. In front of you is a species of cherry plum tree that is relatively common throughout this area. This tree is probably the offspring of plum trees planted by early ranchers. The tree bursts into a beautiful bloom of pink flowers in spring, and its fruit ripens during the summer.

6. This field contains a variety of native grasses, including the California state grass, Foothill Stipa. Beside the creek are tall Oregon white oaks that are popular perching spots for local birds of prey such as redtail hawk and owls.

7. The plant with the broad leaves, called cow parsnip, has been used for centuries to aid digestion and epilepsy. The small woody plants in the midst of the patch of cow parsnip are actually trees. Deer eat the new twigs constantly, keeping the trees small.

8. The trees above you, alongside the stream, are white alders. They grow quickly but don't live long. Ecologists characterize them as "first to tall, first to fall". When alders topple into the creek, their trunks and branches create protected spaces for fish and other water-living animals.

9. Trees have incredibly large root systems. Near creeks like this, their roots stretch well beyond the trail and help stabilize the banks of the stream. The patch of grass below these trees contains sprouts of poison oak, a notorious plant whose oil causes severe itching for most people.

10. This large, lichen-covered boulder is made of the state rock, serpentine or serpentinite. Serpentine is formed on the seabed by molten lava seeping from gaps in tectonic plates. Chunks of serpentine were pushed here from the ocean by eons of earthquake. The rock tends to inhibit plant growth because it has high levels of magnesium and nickel and a lack of essential nutrients like calcium, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. As a result, many of the specially adapted plants that are able to grow in serpentine soil are found nowhere else.

11. This is a great spot to enjoy a view of Hood Mountain to the west. In the spring, the hillside you are standing on is covered in wildflowers such as lupines, poppies, and buttercups that transform the hillside into a wall of color.

12. If you look at this bend of the creek, you can see evidence of a migrating creek bed. Large inlets are carved into the banks of the creek when the water is diverted from its normal path. Sometimes fish and other animals can become trapped in these inlets during periods of low water.

13. Believe it or not, the broken cement dam resting in the stream is important to this creek's ecosystem. The broken dam acts as a filter of sediment and a potential shelter for fish. Fallen trees and logs can serve the same purpose.