

9. (Continued) The broken dam acts as a filter of sediment and a potential shelter for fish. Fallen trees and logs can serve the same purpose.

10. The Pacific Poison Oak on both sides of the trail here is a good reminder to please stay on trails while in the park. Depending on the season the three oily leaflets may be green, orange, yellow, red, or even absent, but these plants can give you a rash any time of year.

11. 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 reflect the many different plant species populating the mountainside.



12. Where the path crosses Rattlesnake Creek, the mud attracts butterflies and other insects. Butterflies eat mostly nectar, which lacks essential minerals. To get minerals, butterflies “puddle” (they land in muddy spot or on animal scat) and slurp the mineral crusts that form as mud dries. Over a dozen species of butterflies can be seen puddling here on hot days. Watch closely to see a butterfly unrolling its proboscis (tube-like mouthparts) onto the mud.

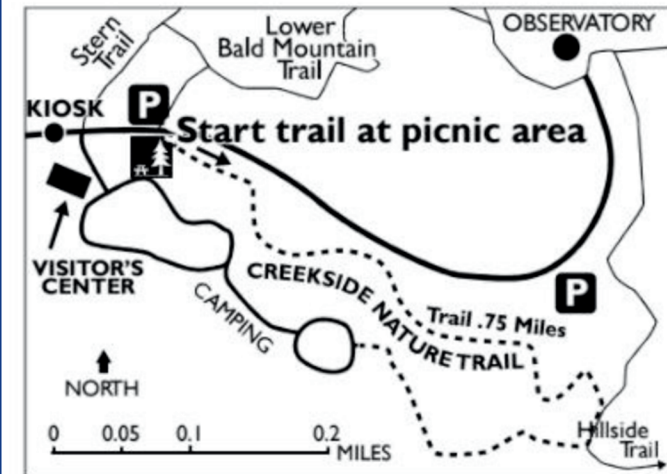
13. This meadow is full of plants that animals rely on. Blue Elder (*Sambucus cerulea*) bushes produce early spring flowers and then berries. Mixed-in among them are summer-fruiting cherry-plums. Mule’s Ears (*Wyethia*, a type of sunflower) bloom and produce seed in late spring. Blackberries linger into autumn.

PLEASE RETURN THIS BROCHURE TO THE VISITOR CENTER once you’re finished with your tour, so that other visitors may also enjoy it.

Brochure updated Spring 2021 by Laura Blatt and Giselle Perez. Based on earlier brochure by Adam Sisk (2014) and earlier versions by Sonoma Ecology Center staff. Edited by Dr. Dan Levitis and Alma Shaw (2024).

CREEKSIDE NATURE TRAIL

This trail alongside Sonoma Creek provides views of many of the park’s plants, animals, and other natural features. It is an easy ¾-mile walk. The first section is ADA-compliant. 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 across the day-use parking lot and ends at the campground. Enjoy your walk!



1. The tree on your right is a California Bay Laurel (*Umbellularia californica*). Indigenous people used its pungent leaves in a tea and to deter biting insects. The leaves were also used medicinally.



1. (Continued) Sadly, California Bay Laurel is prone to carrying and spreading Sudden Oak Death Disease. Black spots on the leaves are a sign of infection.

2. During storms the creek rises and washes soil from the banks. The creek winds from one side of the channel to the other and small beaches form from deposited soil. Frogs love to sun on these beaches when the creek dries up in the summer.

3. This Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) beside the trail has grown tall over the years and is thriving. Although Douglas firs are native to California, they are far less fire resilient than most of our native flora. In 2021 young Douglas Firs are rare in the park because most were killed by recent fires. Their population will recover over several years.



4. The tree to the right of the trail is a Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). The indigenous people in this area hunted along this creek and collected

acorns to make bread, soup, and cakes. They pounded acorns into meal and leached the meal in water to remove tannic acid.

5. Common in dry areas throughout the park, Coyote Brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) is a fast-growing shrub under 3 meters tall. Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. In early spring, you can see their white fuzzy seeds blow in the wind.

6. This large, lichen covered boulder is California's State Rock: serpentine. It 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 earthquakes. The rock tends to inhibit plant growth because of its 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, and many invasive plants won't grow in serpentine soils.



7. Climb to the bench at the top of the small hill for a view of Hood Mountain. The large tree overhead is a California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*). Surrounding you are Bracken ferns, brown and faded in winter. In spring, colorful wildflowers such as lupines and buttercups cover the hillside.

8. If you look at this bend of the creek, you 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 can become trapped in these inlets during periods of low water.

9. Believe it or not, the broken cement dam resting in the stream is important to the creek's ecology (continued).

