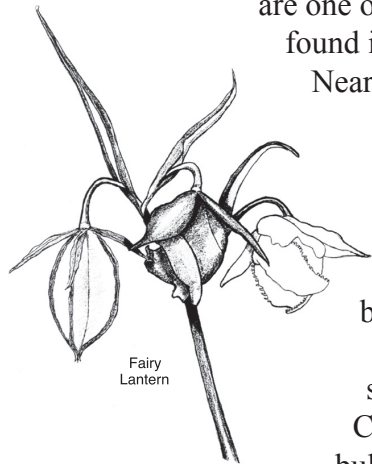


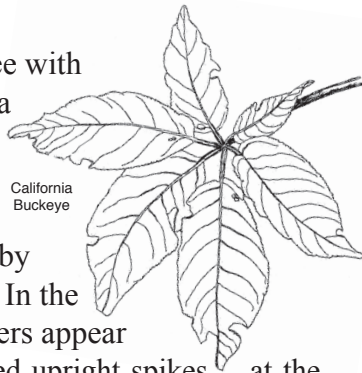
7 Shady areas along the trail are host to soap plant and the **Mount Diablo globe tulip (fairy lantern)**. In the spring, shimmering lemon yellow globe-shaped flowers mark the location of the globe tulips. Endemic (found only here) to Mount Diablo, they are one of many wildflowers found in Mitchell Canyon.



Fairy Lantern

Nearby, loosely crimped leaves emerge from the bulb of the soap plant. After the spring growing period, only brushy brown hairs remain, covering the starchy bulb. Native Californians used the bulbs of soap plants as food as well as for glue, soap, and brushes.

8 The small tree with silvery white bark is a **California buckeye**. Buckeyes drop their leaves during August and September, thereby conserving moisture. In the spring, buckeye flowers appear as large, cream-colored upright spikes at the ends of branch tips. In the fall, baseball-sized pear-shaped fruit pods, containing glossy brown seeds, hang from the branch tips. Native Californians crushed buckeye seeds, tossed them into slow moving streams, thereby stupefying fish, which then floated to the surface.



California Buckeye

9 Coyote bush lines the road here. Evergreen all year, with small, fragrant leaves, coyote bush has separate (dioecious) male and female plants. Creamy disc-shaped flowers distinguish male plants whereas the flowers of female plants are white. As you continue along the trail vegetation becomes less dense. **Western fence lizards** may dart across the trail. Each male “blue-belly” establishes a territory, defending it by bluff and fighting. Their bluff posture resembles push-ups, which show the blue markings.



Western Fence Lizard

10 The trail begins to climb as you round this corner. Rising above you are south-facing rocky slopes covered with chaparral vegetation. Hard-leaved evergreen shrubs dominate chaparral. Adapted to nutrient poor soils and harsh conditions, leaves are stiff, thick, and often have a waxy coating. **Toyon (California holly or Christmas berry)** inhabit the spine of the ascending slope. Dark green serrated (holly like) leaves, contrasted with bright orange-red berries in late fall and early winter, earned the plant its common names.



Toyon



P.O. Box 346 Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346
Telephone: (925) 927-7222
Text: Linda Sanford & Marjorie Ratner

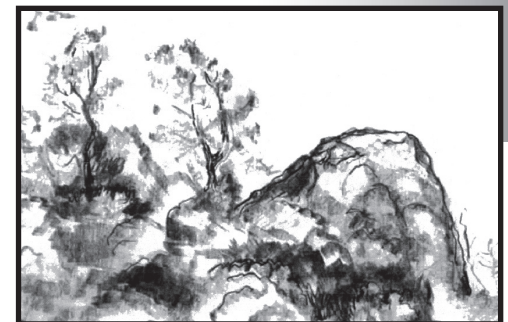
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Illustrations: Bill Pierson



MITCHELL CANYON TRAIL INTERPRETIVE GUIDE



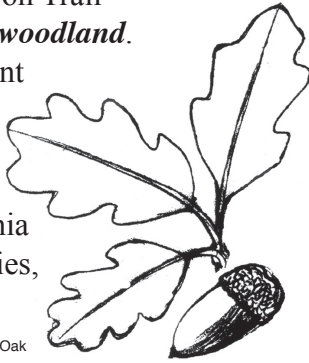
WELCOME TO MT. DIABLO STATE PARK

Mitchell Canyon Trail, available to hikers, bicyclists, and horses is level for the first two miles except for a slight gain in elevation at the beginning. This interpretive guide is keyed to ten numbered posts along the first mile of the trail.

1 Mitchell Canyon Trail begins within an ***oak woodland***.

Blue oak, the dominant species, is deciduous, dropping its leaves in the fall. Wild oats, introduced to California by Spanish missionaries, fill the grassy areas.

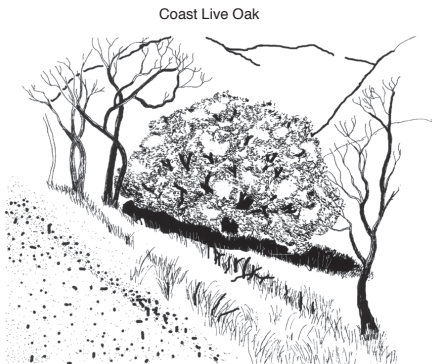
The gray-green needle-leaved trees upslope are Coulter Pine, producers of the heaviest cones of all the pines. Standing above the trees is Mitchell Rock, an outcrop of pillow basalt, formed during the Jurassic period when this region was part of a sea-floor spreading center in the Pacific Ocean.



Blue Oak

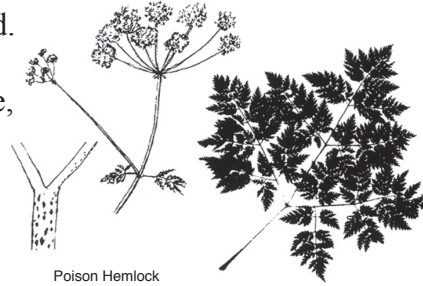
2 Down slope, on the right side of the road, is a large ***coast live oak***, one of the most common trees on Mount Diablo. Over two hundred years old, this tree was selected by the Daughters of the American Revolution to commemorate the bi-centennial of the U.S. Constitution and the men and women who worked for its adoption. Live oaks are evergreen, with leaves remaining year round. Their small, hard, leathery leaves conduct photosynthesis at a low rate.

This prevents wilting and loss of moisture during California's dry, hot summers.



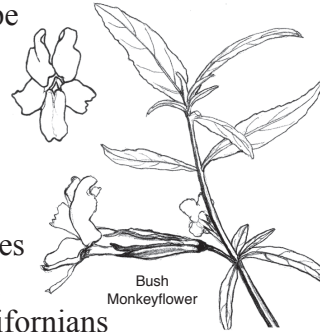
Coast Live Oak

3 Mitchell Creek lies below you, winding around a former man-made pond. Non-native species of mustard, thistle, and ***poison hemlock*** fill the former pond site. On the slopes above the pond site, California sagebrush, blue bush lupine, California poppies (the state flower) and other native plants abound. Above the stream course, clumps of mistletoe, parasitic to live oaks, hang from the oak trees. Although toxic to humans, mistletoe bears sticky white berries on which many birds love to feed.



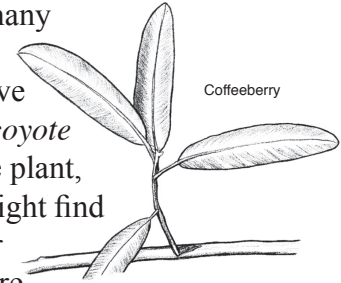
Poison Hemlock

4 ***Bush (sticky) monkeyflower***, bearing funnel-shaped yellow-orange flowers that remain through spring and summer, grows in profusion on the slope adjacent to the trail. Common on dry hillsides, monkeyflower leaves have a sticky coating that minimizes moisture loss during hot days. Native Californians once used the leaves to cover cuts and scrapes. Miner's lettuce grows nearby in moist shaded areas during the rainy season. Early settlers and Gold Rush miners ate the small leaves of miner's lettuce when fresh vegetables were unavailable, hence the name.



Bush Monkeyflower

5 Growing near the post is ***coffeeberry***. Variable in form, this shrub has no relationship to the beverage but produces dark purple fruits that encase coffee bean-shaped seeds. The seeds are bitter, however, many mammals eat and disperse them. Observe the accumulation of ***coyote scat*** at the base of the plant, near the post. You might find berries as well as hair in the scat. Coyotes are omnivores (consume both plants and animals) and like to deposit their scat in open, flat areas where trails cross or dip down a little knoll.



Coffeeberry

6 Willows, alders, and an occasional Fremont cottonwood line the banks of Mitchell Creek forming a riparian (streamside) community. Tangled layers of shrubs are covered with climbing vines of California grape, wild cucumber, blackberries, and clematis. California quail, our state bird, hide in the thick underbrush. As the day warms, butterflies flit amidst the foliage. Often ***California sisters***, mourning cloaks, and swallowtail butterflies add splashes of color along this section of the trail.



California Sisters