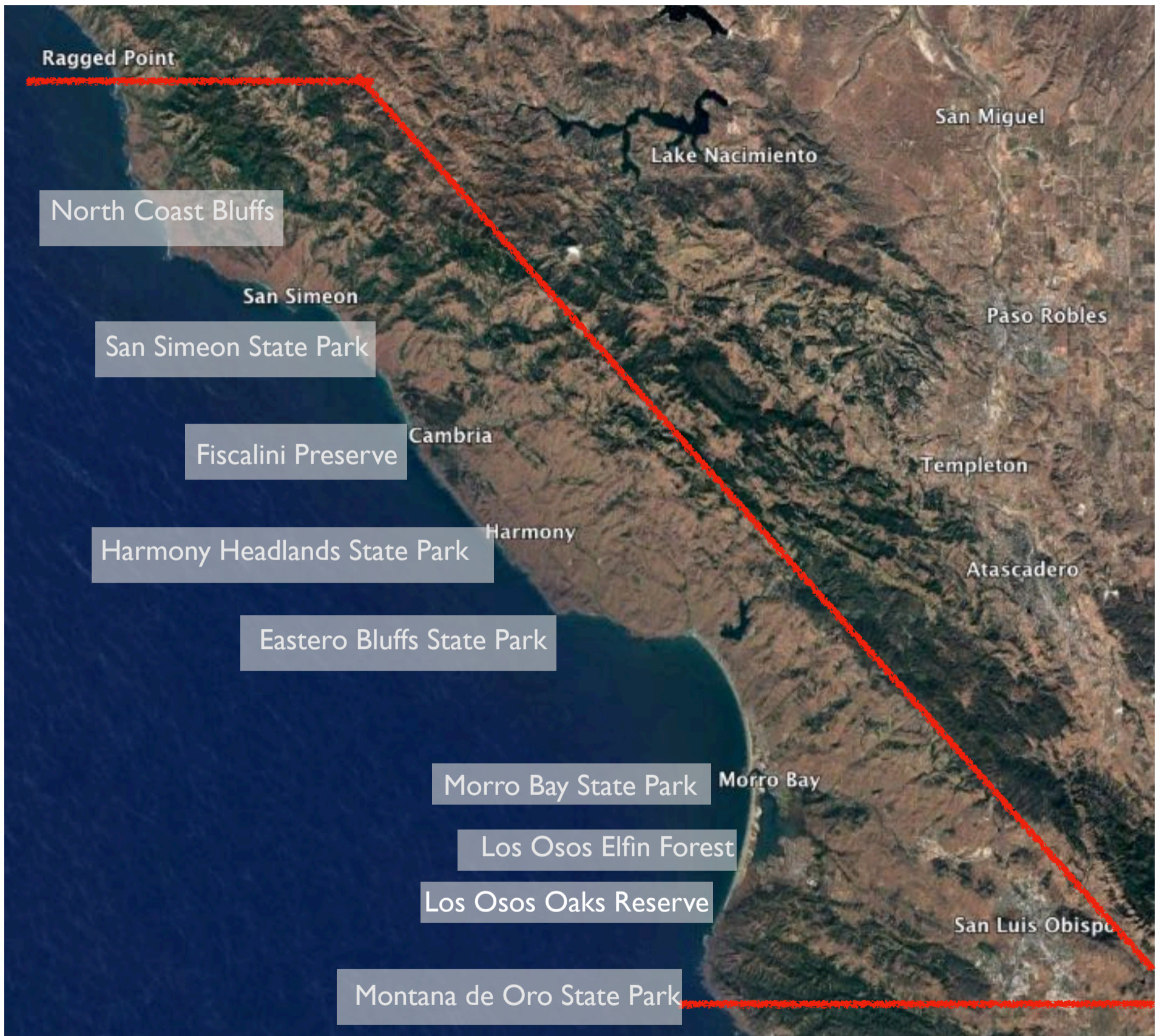


San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society

GREAT PLACES TO VIEW NATIVE PLANTS IN NORTH COASTAL  
SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Click Place Names in Gray Rectangles to Navigate



Plant Lists Covering This Area

North Coast: <https://cnpsslo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/San-Simeon-Coast-checklist-09Jun19.pdf>

Morro Bay State Park: <https://cnpsslo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Morro-Bay-State-Park-checklist-07Jun19.pdf>

Montana de Oro State Park: <https://cnpsslo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Montan%C5%BDa-de-Oro-Checklist-07Jun19.pdf>





The coastal terraces north of San Simeon offer many interesting plant displays. We recommend walking to the coast just south of Arroyo de la Cruz, just north of Point Sierra Nevada, and just north of Arroyo De Los Chinos. The terraces were formed when a higher sea level reached a shoreline which had beaches and sea cliffs at the base of the hills east of the highway. The ocean bevelled off the bedrock, and then withdrew to a level lower than seen today. The bevelled bedrock was then covered by sediment washed westward from the old sea cliffs, and sand blown eastward from the beaches of the now-lowered ocean. As the sea regained its present level, it eroded the western edge of the older terrace, revealing the reddish sand of the older dunes, and laying down modern dunes as you can see at Point Sierra Nevada.



# ARROYO DE LOS CHINOS



Driving north, passing the Piedras Blancas Light Station and the bridge over Arroyo de la Cruz, the road climbs a hill, staying fairly straight until an S-bend. When a long straightaway opens up ahead of you, prepare to pull off at the base of the hill near a gully crossing. There are pull-outs on both sides of the road. Go through gaps in the fence.

A fence gap south of the gully will take you to an overgrown trail along the bluff edge, and not the best choice for those trying to avoid poison oak. The trail crosses remnants of an ancient dune toward a lower area of clays, and then to a ridge made of ancient dune sand.

The fence gap north of the gully enables you to walk along the bluffs to the north, starting on clay substrate. A short distance to the north you will have to circumvent a deeply incised gully by crossing just below the highway culvert. But reaching the higher bluff edge formed by a seacliff truncated old dune. Return to the bluffs and continue northward. You will cross both sandy and clay-rich substrates with different native plant assemblages.

As you set out northward through the fence, note the willows in the creek. These are Sitka willow, which is uncommon in SLO County. Note also the sedges and yellow-eyed grass in spring-fed seeps at the high part of the terrace.



Descend from the fence to the dark ultramafic-derived soils closer to the bluff. These were washed over the bedrock from outcrops east of the highway. Look for *Calochortus uniflorus* and *Fritillaria biflora* in early spring, and *Calochortus luteus* and blue-eyed grass later in the year. The strongly scented mint *Popogyne douglasii*, together with tarweeds and spiky *Eryngium* will also be dominants later in the season. Look for *Dudleya* close to the bluffs.

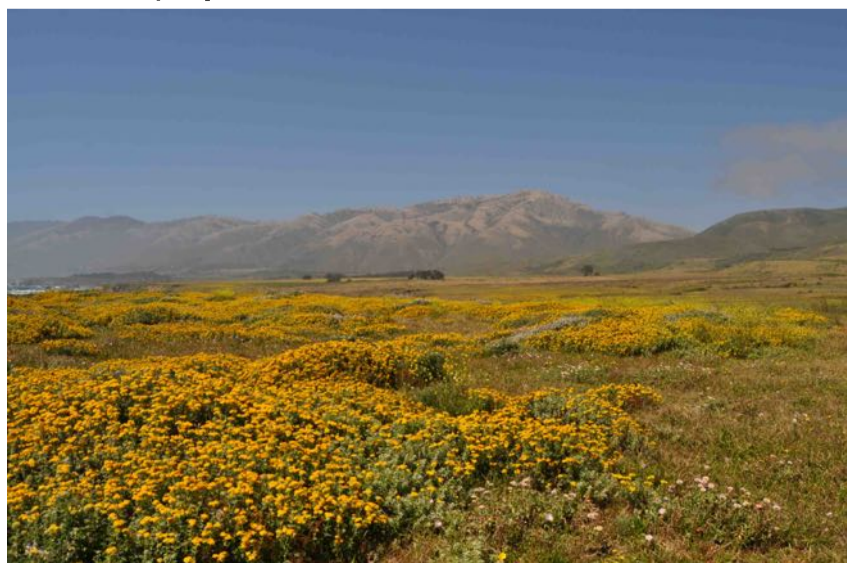


(L) *Calochortus uniflorus* and (R) *Fritillaria biflora* in early spring



(L) *Calochortus luteus* and (R) *Popogyne douglasii*

After rounding the top of the gully, you will find an ancient sand dunes topping the bluffs, makes by a dense population of coast golden yarrow (*Eriophyllum staechadifolium*) L. below) and two species of buckwheat (R. below), plus stands of California aster (*Corethrogyne filaginifolia*).



You will see some groups of Douglas iris. North of the large stand of coast golden arrow, the substrate returns to a thin veneer of clay over bedrock. The clay has been eroded to reveal serpentinite bedrock along gullies crossing the terrace.



(L) *Douglas iris* and (R) *California aster* on old sand dune in early spring

Look for dwarf brodiaea (*Brodiaea terrestris*) in the gullies. *Clarkia rubicunda* can be found on the bluff edge in late spring in this northern part of the area.



(L) *Brodiaea terrestris* and (R) *Clarkia rubicunda*

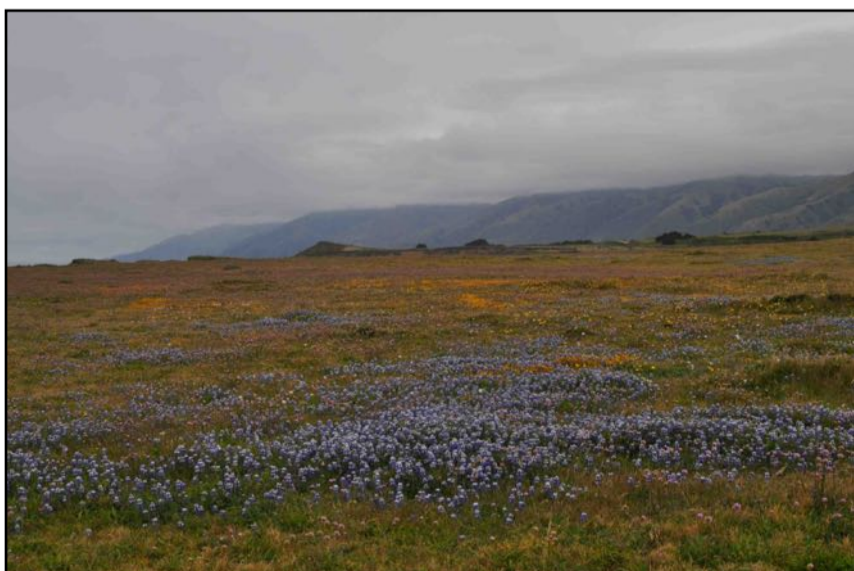
North of this is a drainage and fence line marking part of the Hearst Ranch. *Hint: If you want to kneel on the ground to photograph plants on the clay substrate, be aware that the Eryngium is VERY spiky and hard to avoid, so bring something for your protection.*



# POINT SIERRA NEVADA



Northbound from the Arroyo de la Cruz, look for gates in the fence with narrow pullouts on the west side of the road. The trail starts in grassland, with seasonal flower fields of California poppy and sky-lupine, with sandier soils on the higher slopes and more clay and gravel on the lower slopes.. Cross a small riparian area, with the trail merging with the beach. Find your own way into modern sand dunes that originate from sand trapped on the northwest side of Point Sierra Nevada. Look for compact cobweb thistle in the dunes.



The grasslands can show extensive fields of sky lupine and California poppy in years of sufficient rainfall.



The active dunes also carry extensive flower fields of yellow *Abronia latifolia* and blue *Phacelia ramosissima*.



## PIEDRAS BLANCAS



This trail connects two parking areas, one just north of the Elephant Seal Viewing Area, and the other north of the road to the lighthouse. Both the northern and southern parts of the trail touch relatively young sand dunes and wetlands. Look for willow-herb *Epilobium ciliatum* in the wetlands. Off-trail access is restricted, but plenty of plants can be seen along the trail. Access to the lighthouse can only be made by arrangement, so the trail is solely from parking lot to parking lot.



# ARROYO DE LA CRUZ



Park at the wide parking area and roadcut just south the northbound down grade to the Arroyo de la Cruz bridge. Walk south to the gated entrance. The main trail heads toward the beach at the mouth of Arroyo de la Cruz through shrubland and grassland. The trail passes through native grassland, dense bluff-top stands of mixed golden yarrow, white yarrow, and *Dudleya*, the diminutive *Clarkia prostrata*, pink *Armeria maritima* (thrift), and other bluff-top plants before descending to the beach at the mouth of Arroyo de la Cruz. The back of the beach is covered by beach bursage. This is a short walk. Note the red monkey flower at the parking lot, a Caltrans planting that clashes with the native yellow monkey flowers of the area.



(L) *White and Golden Yarrow* and (R) *Clarkia prostrata*





# HEARST SAN SIMEON STATE PARK



Coastal bluff wildflowers are well represented on the Junge Ranch Trail. The best access is from the southern end of the San Simeon business district. It can also be reached from the northern dead-end of the frontage road accessed across from the San Simeon Creek Rd.

The greatest variety of plants can be seen on the Loop Trail, best accessed from the parking area with toilet that is easy of Highway 1 just before San Simeon Creek Road. Take the boardwalk east beside the willows, and then join the trail at the right when you reach the road, It crosses an extensive wetland, climbs through a Monterey pine forest, crosses the wetland again and climbs to the campground. Opposite the eastern edge of the campground is a trail to a grass land with several vernal pools. The loop trail continues, with several parallel paths, back to the boardwalk.



# JUNGE RANCH TRAIL



Starting at the north end, the trail starts on a clay substrate that supports chocolate lilies, buttercups and *Calochortus uniflorus* in the early spring. The trail then climbs onto an ancient sand dune that was blown eastward over an exposed marine terrain have extensive cover of *Armeria maritima* (thrift), *Erigeron glaucus* (seaside daisy) and *Lupinus arboreus* (tree lupine). The trail descends the southern slope of the old dune toward a seasonal creek with *Carex* and *Juncus* species and *Sisyrinchium californicum* (yellow-eyed grass), then climbs onto a low flat surface of thin soils over shallow bedrock that supports extensive seasonal wetland. This continues to the southern end of the property.



(L) Chocolate lilies on clay substrate and (R) Thrift on the old sand dune



(L) Seaside daisies and poppies on sand substrate and (R) Yellow-eyed grass in wetlands

The southern end of this hike has some colorful displays of introduced and weedy pink-purple radish and yellow mustard, A little way past the stream crossing is a wetland with dark green leaved *Oenanthe sarmentosa* (March parsley).



(L) *Oenanthe sarmentosa* marsh and (R) Bush lupine and radish at the southern end of the trail



San Simeon  
Map



# LOOP TRAIL



Starting at the parking lot east of Highway 1, it is worth walking under the highway to look at the wetlands and beach. Go east on the raised boardwalk through the edge of a willow grove, turning onto the foot trail. The trail follows the boundary of a freshwater marsh with a grassland, usually with poppies. The trail crosses the marsh on a raised boardwalk and climbs into the Monterey pine forest.



(L) Pickleweed at the brackish west end of the marsh and (R) Monterey pine forest



Continue through the forest, and then descend the steep trail back to the wetland, which is here a dense willow forest. The descent is on a north-facing slope with ferns and mosses. At the base of the slope, a boardwalk crosses the wetland, and then climbs the south facing slope of grassland to the edge of the Washburn campground. You can return to the start by taking a trail from the campground to the base of the hill, paralleling the paved road. Look for the low-growing but large-flowered yellow suncups (*Taraxia ovata*) In the grassland.

## VERNAL POOLS

A trail to the vernal pools lies east of the eastern end of Washburn campground, where you will find an information sign. Take the trail through the grassland on the right side of the entrance, continuing till you see another information sign adjacent to a large vernal pool. 'Vernal' means 'Spring', the term indicating that these pools fill in the winter, support a number of wetland plants that grow and set seed before the pools dry out in late springtime. The pools exist because the ground surface at this location is underlain by clays that have sealed the bottoms of the pools. This is often associated with a ground surface that has remained in place for a very long time, allowing the clay seal to develop. You are standing on a very old coastal terrace, most of which has been eroded by the local streams.



(L) Vernal pool with water, early in season; (R) Pool with popcorn flower in mid-spring

# FISCALINI PRESERVE



Fiscalini Preserve's coastal portion consists of a low coastal terrace and a slope that climbs into a Monterey pine forest on an ancient older terrace floored with sandstone. The forest is best seen by entering at Tipton St. or at Santa Rosa Creek. The pines are the second largest native stand in the world, the largest being in Monterey. The trees have the largest cones compared to other stands. You can take several loop trails through the forest, including one that parallels a seasonal wetland. Look for the tall and understated grass-like orchids (*Piperia elongata*) and seen in photo.

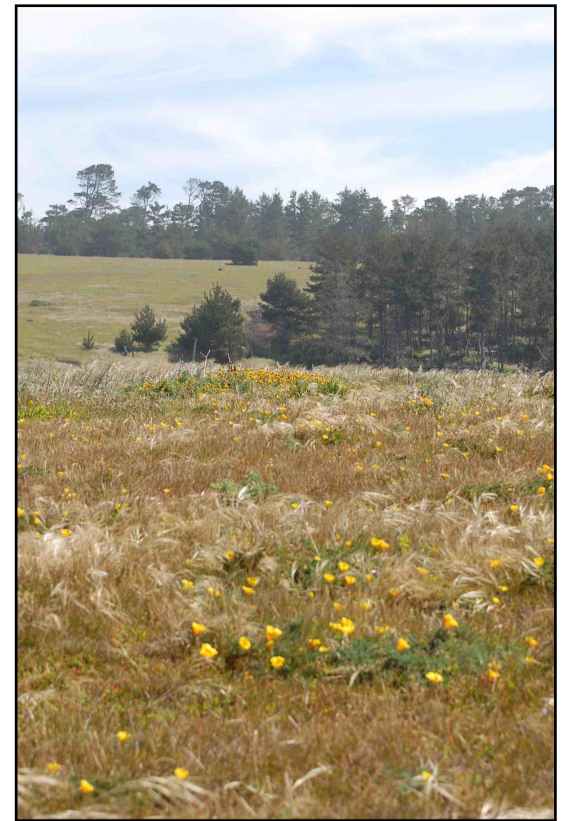


Monterey pine forest, showing a range of tree ages. Monterey pine is short-lived, and has cones that release seed after fire, although some cones release seed on warm days.





There are several trails that run from the western edge of the pine forest to the Bluff Trail along the shoreline. These are good places to look for grassland plants, and also wetland plants in the line of springs on the hillside. These occur where the interface between the bedrock and overlying and more permeable soils reach the surface.



The coastal trail that connects Windsor Blvd. with Marlborough Lane is very popular. The trail crosses three old sand dunes that were blown across the coastal terrace before the ocean eroded the present shoreline. In between the dunes are areas that have finer soils and are wetter.



Some of the spectacular displays of wildflowers to be seen on the Fiscalini bluff trail



# HARMONY HEADLANDS STATE PARK



This is the newest State Park on the coast, with access from Highway 1 between the tiny hamlet of Harmony, and Villa Creek, where the northbound road leaves the coastal terrace north of Cayucos. There is a small parking area with informational signing. At the present time hiking is restricted to the old road that leads to the ocean, and although there are some interesting plants to be seen in the wetlands to the south, they are considered 'off-limits'. At the coast, the road descends to the coastal terrace which has a representative number of coastal terrace plants but is not known for spectacular displays. The coast is very scenic and worth the walk.



Clockwise from Top Left: Wetlands south of trail; Nuttall's locoweed; Scenic bluffs; Coast golden bush on terrace





# ESTERO BLUFFS STATE PARK

This State Park extends along the coastal terrace from the north end of Cayucos to Villa Creek, where Highway 1 leaves the coast. There are many parking areas. This area used to be heavily grazed, but native plants recovering, especially along the bluff edge which was left untouched. Two hills, which were off-shore sea stacks when the terrace was forming, also have wildflowers and can show big displays of California poppy. Two dominant native species are the spiky, low growing *Eryngium armatum*, and during rainy years, spectacular displays of blue-eyed grass. The sandy back-beach at the mouth has a lots of beach-bursage, but is closed off during snowy plover nesting season.



(L) Masses of blue-eyed grass with old sea stacks (R) California goldfields at the bluff edge



(L) Beach bursage (*Ambrosia chamissonis*) (R) Coyote thistle (*Eryngium armatum*)



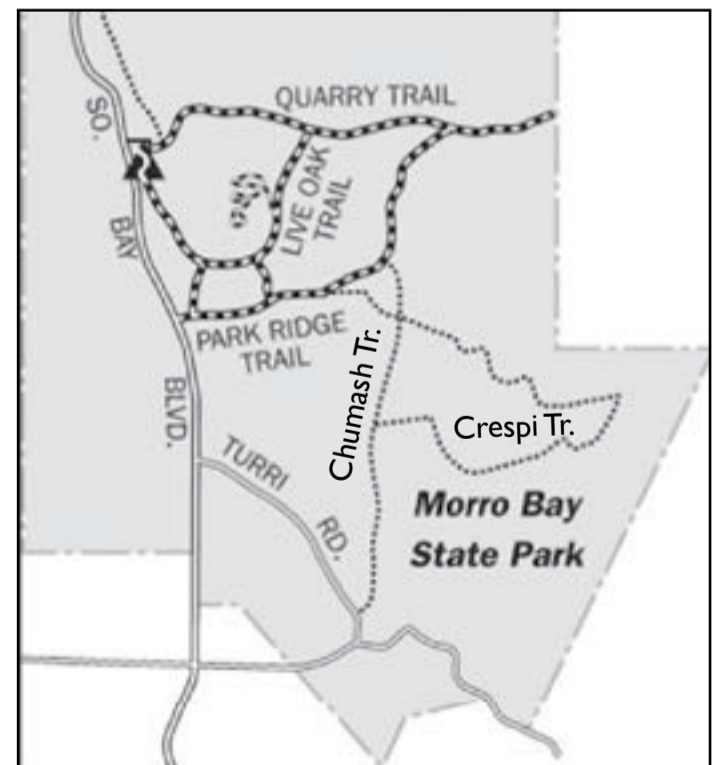
# MORRO BAY STATE PARK



Morro Bay State Park boasts a large variety of trails and habitats. The easiest is the Marina Boardwalk that borders the salt marsh and is accessed from the east end of the marina. The trail was built of dredge tailings from the excavation of the marina's basin, so the salt marsh is just on one side of the trail.

The best native plant viewing can be found east of South Bay Boulevard, best accessed from the Quarry parking lot. The aptly named Quarry Trail crosses the base of Cerro Cabrillo at an abandoned quarry and then precedes across grassland to the eastern edge of the park. Several other trails branch southward from this trail.

The Chumash Trail heads north from Turri Toad. This is also on grassland and follows a drainage and a buried pipeline. The Crespi Trail is a loop toward the east which is highly recommended, passing through grassland, oak woodland, and rocky areas.



# MORRO BAY STATE PARK BOARDWALK

The dominant plant in the saltmarsh is Pickleweed (*Salicornia pacifica*) that covers most of the higher intertidal zone. Closer to the boardwalk is the saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), sea lavender (*Limonium californicum*), and Alkali heath (*Frankenia salina*).

In the rocky riprap at the east end of the marina, look for the local endemic California sea blite (*Suaeda californica*).



(Top left) *Suaeda californica*; (Top right) *Salicornia pacifica*; (Center left) *Limonium californicum*; (Center right) *Frankenia salina*; (Bottom left) *Distichlis spicata*; (Bottom right) Tidal marsh

# EAST MORRO BAY STATE PARK

**QUARRY TRAIL:** Taking the trail from the northeast corner of the Quarry Parking Lot, climb toward the dacite rocks of Cerro Cabrillo. Before you start, see if the pink Davy's centaury (*Zeltnera davyi*) is in bloom behind the parking lot fence. The buckwheat *Eriogonum fasciculatum*, seen as you climb the hill, may have been introduced. Passing through a chaparral of California sage and black sage, you will see prickly pear as the trail turns eastward. Once you reach the grasslands, which are mostly on clay soils, look for clay adobe lily (*Calochortus argillosus*). This trail offers expansive views of Morro Bay and the Los Osos and Chorro Valleys.



(Left) Davy's Centaury (*Zeltnera davyi*); (Right) Clay-loving mariposa lily (*Calochortus argillosus*)

**CHUMASH-CRESPI TRAIL:** Entering from Turri Road, follow the trail northward. Expect to see blue-eyed grass and common golden star in the spring, and hayfield tarweed in the summer. Take the Crespi Trail that climbs onto the dacite bedrock of the Morro, and where it joins another trail, go left and eventually drop down into a small oak woodland. Emerging from the woodland, the trail climbs and turns back to the west. At the trail fork, the Turri Trail on the left will take you back to Turri Road. The Crespi Trail on the right climbs a hill then descends toward the Crespi/Chumash trail junction you passed earlier. This descent passes through an area rich in chocolate lilies in years of good rainfall



(Left) Golden star *Bloomeria crocea*; (Right) Hayfield tarred *Hemizonia congesta*

# MORRO BAY STATE PARK POWELL UNITS



**POWELL 1 UNIT:** Turn east at the traffic signal at South Bay Blvd. and Santa Ysabel, park, and walk past the road barricade to the adjacent entrance, which is signed. Follow the trail through a good representation of coastal dune scrub. The trail follows the top of the slope that drops into Los Osos Creek's extensive riparian woodland. Look for blue giant woolly-star (*Eriastrum densifolium*) and the low-growing sand almond (*Prunus fasciculata* var. *punctata*). Note the shells from an extensive Chumash midden complex.



(Left) Giant woolly star (*Eriastrum densifolium*); (Right) Sand almond (*Prunus fasciculata*)

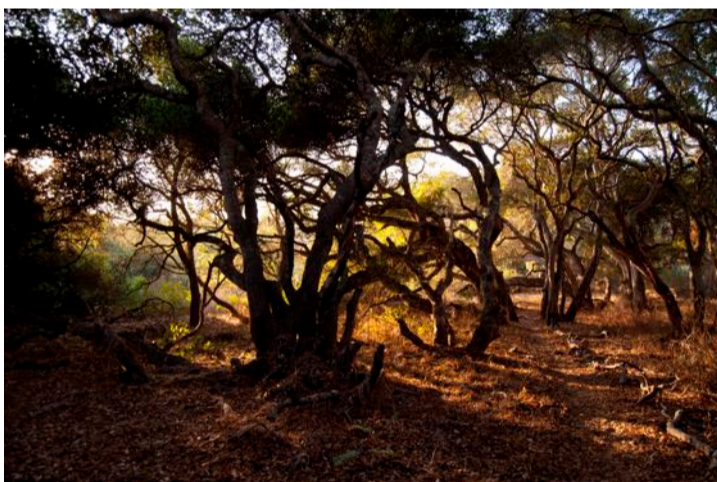
POWELL 2 UNIT: This can be accessed from the trail through the Powell 1 Unit. This had most native vegetation removed for crops, and is not recovering well. It offers access to the Los Osos Creek riparian zone, and the southern portion has an extensive cover of dune bush lupine (*Lupinus chamissonis*). The area is severely impacted by invasive veldt grass.



(Left) Dune bush lupine (*Lupinus chamissonis*); (Right) Black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*)

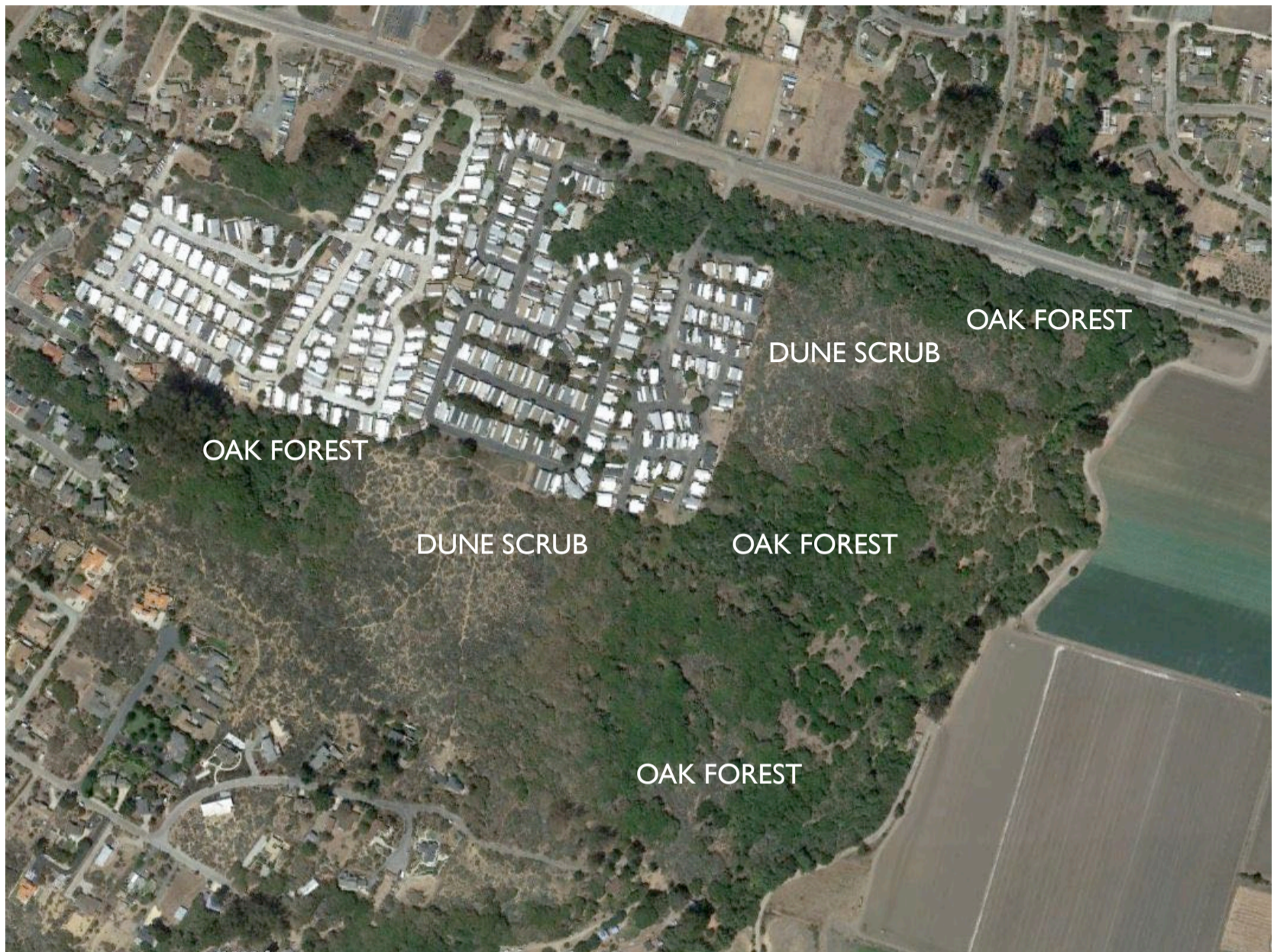
## LOS OSOS ELFIN FOREST

The Elfin Forest is a great example of coastal dune scrub and pygmy coast live oak woodland. It can be reached from the northern ends of 11th through 16th streets in Los Osos. Managed jointly by California State Parks and the non-profit Small Wilderness Area Preserves, it boasts well maintained trails and boardwalks. Look for fuchsia-flowered gooseberry, and white-flowering dune buckbrush in early spring.



(Top Left) Pygmy live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*); (Top Right) Purple clarkia (*Clarkia purpurea*); (Bottom Left) Fuchsia flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*); (Bottom Right) Buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *fascicularis*)

# LOS OSOS OAKS RESERVE



Los Osos Oaks Reserve is a California State Park site situated at the far eastern end of Los Osos on Los Osos Valley Road. On leaving the parking lot and crossing the spring-fed stream you can go to the right, a bit to the left, or hard left. Going right or a bit to the left will take you through coastal dune scrub and into the oak forest. The trails rejoin to complete a loop. Going to the left on the Los Osos Creek Trail will take you on a trail that parallels Los Osos Creek but high on the bank. That trail will fork, with the right fork taking you to the junction of the two loops, but the left fork continuing along the edge of the creek. This will bring you to the Oak View Trail, which goes through a lot more oak woodland.

When in coastal dune scrub, look for the dominant Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) and dune buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *fascicularis*), both with white flowers. Also look for the narrowly endemic Morro manzanita (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*) which only grows on the older dune sands that underlie most of the Reserve.

The older sand dunes were deposited on a clay dominated terrace developed when Los Osos Creek was flowing at a much higher level than today. Seasonal wetlands occur where groundwater flowing through the dune sand and flowing along the top of the impervious clay reaches the surface.

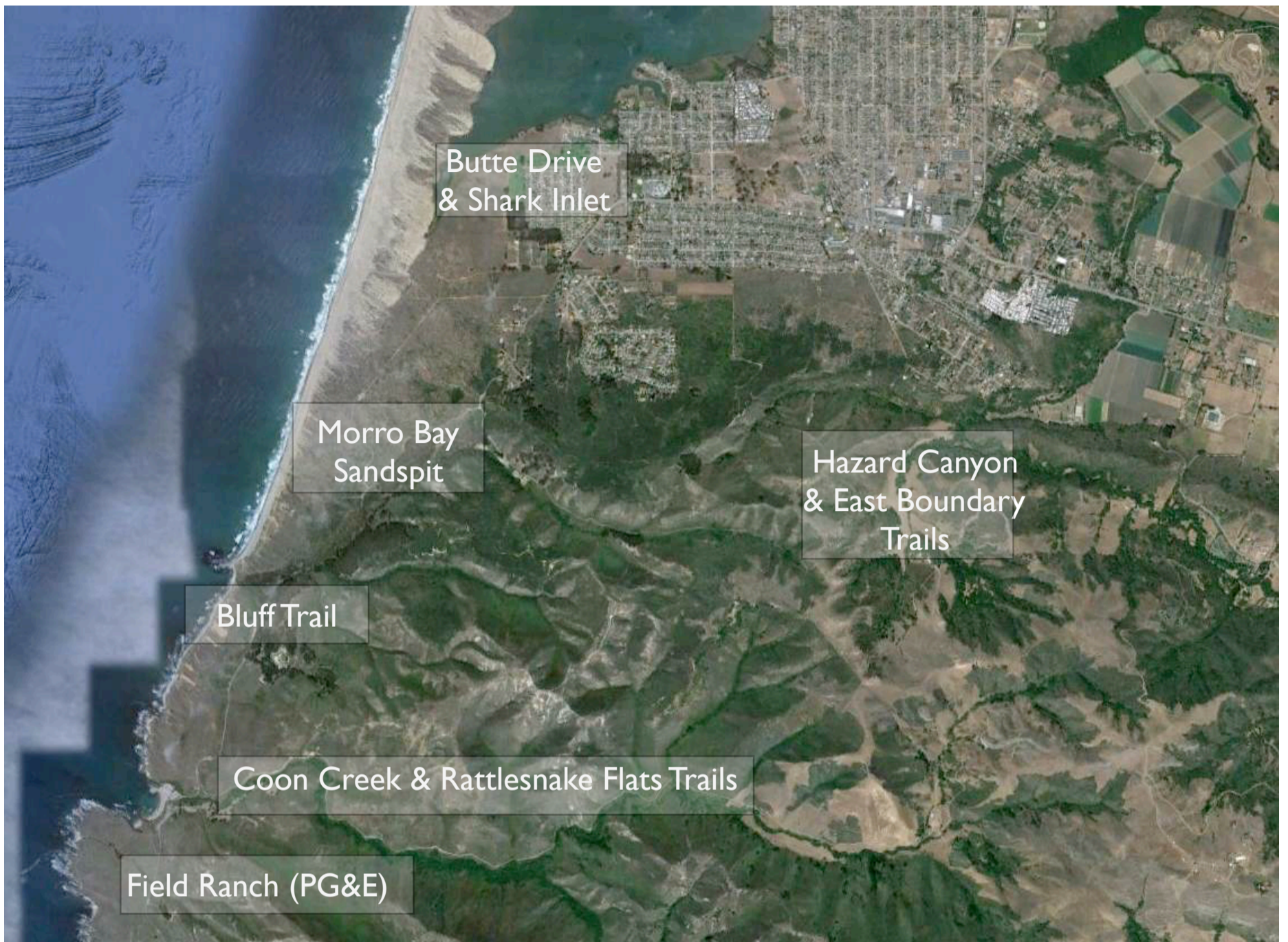




(Top left) Coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*); (Top right) Cut-leaved sanicle (*Sanicula laciniata*)  
(Center left) Purple clarkia (*Clarkia purpurea*); (Center right) Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*)  
(Bottom left) Dune buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *fascicularis*); (Bottom right) Morro manzanita (*Arctostaphylos morroensis*)



# MONTANA DE ORO STATE PARK



Montana de Oro State Park offers a wide range of habitats and plant communities. Here we will address some of the many trails to show a representative selection of habitats.

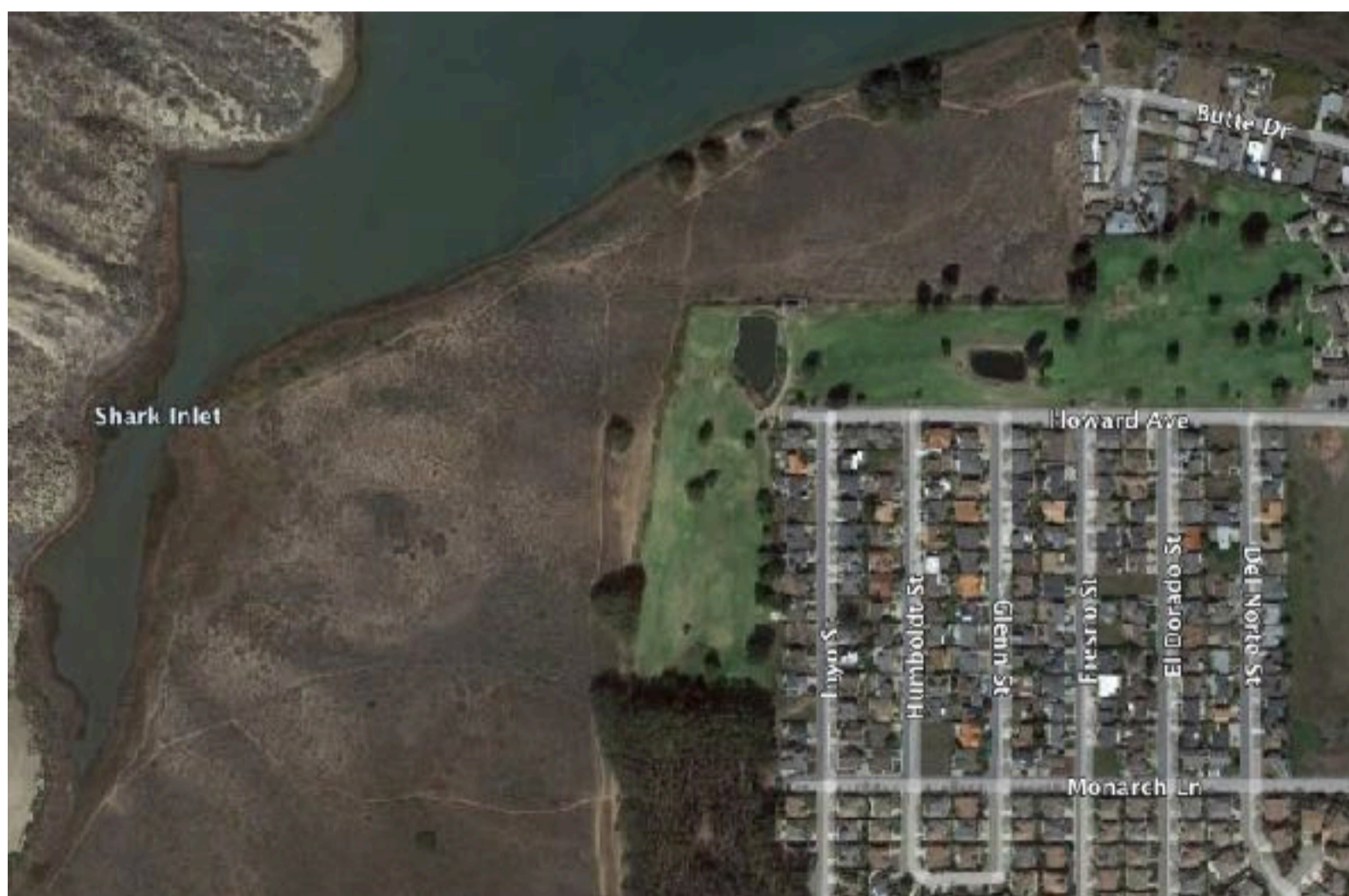
At the north end of the park you can explore a community of plants on older stabilized sand dunes, tidal marsh and freshwater marsh plants. We recommend entering from the western termination of Butte Drive in Los Osos. If you park at the Sandspit Parking Area, you can walk through the older dunes to the active dunes of the Morro Bay sandspit, which host different plants than the stabilized dunes.

To the south, the popular Bluff Trail takes you from Spooner Cove to the southern edge of the park, with a substrate of alluvial fan gravels covering the bedrock of an old wave-cut platform formed during a past higher stand of sea level. Somewhat similar conditions can be found south of the park on the Field Ranch, owned by PG&E.

There are several trails that lead eastward into the steep-walled valleys cut by several streams in Pliocene shale bedrock. Hazard Canyon is reached through the Horse Camp adjacent to the park entrance, and offers connection to other trails. Here we will limit discussion to the East Boundary trail, which enters geology of the Franciscan formation, including a flower-rich serpentine outcrop. The East Boundary Trail can also be reached via Islay Creek Road that traverses the central portion of the path.

At the southern end of the park, the Coon Creek trail follows a perennial stream through a varied community of plants. The steep slopes at the south side of the valley produce a lot of shade on the valley floor which, together with the summer fog, support a number of plants normally seen in the wetter parts of northern California. It is possible to take both the Coon Creek and southern portion of the Rattlesnake Flats trail from the Coon Creek parking lot. The latter trail climbs through elevated coastal terraces which support different plants than those seen along Coon Creek.

## BUTTE DRIVE AND SHARK INLET



Start your walk at the west end of Butte Drive in Los Osos. Take the foot trail to the edge of the saltmarsh immediately west of the entrance. This might be muddy after storms or extremely high tides, but offers a variety of tidal marsh plants and



scenic views of Morro Bay. Once past the eucalyptus trees you should move inland to the shore-parallel trail that continues toward the southern end of Morro Bay at Shark Inlet.



Plants of the salt marsh (Top left) Alkali heath (*Frankenia salina*); (Top right) Salty susan (*Jaumea carnosa*); (Bottom left) Watson's saltbush (*Atriplex watsonii*); (Bottom right) California sea-lavender (*Limonium californicum*)

There are a freshwater seeps at the edge of the salt marsh that support several species, including southern goldenrod (*Solidago confinis*), coast golden bush (*Isocoma menziesii*) and giant spiny rush (*Juncus acutus*).



(Left) Coast golden bush (*Isocoma menziesii*); (Right) Southern golden bush (*Solidago confinis*) (

As the trail turns southward, note that some of the dunes on the ocean side have slumped into the saltmarsh, pushing up former salt marsh into land now above the tideline. Note also the willows growing out of the sand dunes, having been buried by the advancing sand but always growing upward toward the sun. Beyond Shark Inlet is a place where many people climb up into the dunes.

## MORRO BAY SANDSPIT

The road to the sandspit is on your right as you descend from the park entrance. The trail from the parking lot traverses coastal dune scrub that can also be seen along the Shark Inlet trail. Common plants are dune buckbrush (*Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *fascicularis*), coffee berry (*Frangula californica*), mock heather (*Ericameria ericoides*) and dune almond (*Prunus fasciculata* var. *punctata*). The trail crosses into the active foredunes and descends to the beach. Access to the foredunes is restricted during the snowy plover nesting season.

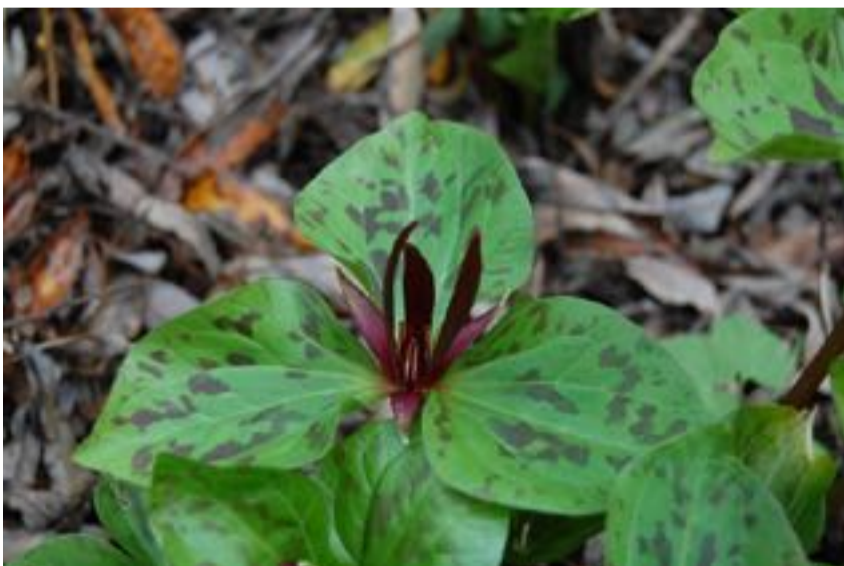
The active dunes display magenta beach sand-verbena (*Abronia maritima*) and yellow sand-verbena (*Abronia latifolia*) and beach evening-primrose (*Camissonia cheiranthifolia*).



Plants of the active dunes (Top left) Beach sand-verbena (*Abronia maritima*); (Top right) Beach evening-primrose (*Camissonia cheiranthifolia*) (Bottom left) Yellow sand-verbena (*Abronia latifolia*); (Bottom right) Blochman's leafy daisy (*Erigeron blochmaniae*)

# COON CREEK AND RATTLESNAKE FLATS TRAILS

The following is for the Coon Creek Trail, starting at the Coon Creek parking lot. Head to the southeast corner of the lot and start down the dirt trail. At the top of the hill a trail to the left connects with the Rattlesnake Flats Trail. Descend through the swale and up to the small grove of coast live oak. A chamise, black sage and coffee-berry dominated shrubland continues as you descend toward the arroyo willows and dogwood of Coon Creek. Up to the first bridge look for coastal sage scrub plants on the left and riparian woodland on the right. The south-facing slope can carry the beautiful blue sticky phacelia. Look for white violets around the bridge, and the burned but recovering forest of Bishop pine on the southern slopes as you head for the second bridge. The blue-blossom *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* var. *griseus* is spectacular in the early spring. Look for infrequent *Trillium angustipetalum* along the trail along its lowest and dampest points. There are a few silk-tassel trees between the second bridge and the main Rattlesnake Flats Trail junction, and one is located just short of the junction. You can choose to take the Rattlesnake trail to loop back to the parking lot, or continue to the end of the Coon Trail.



(Top left) Silk-tassel (*Garrya elliptica*); (Top right) Bishop pine (*Pinus muricata*); (Bottom left) Trillium (*Trillium angustipetalum*); (Bottom right) Sticky phacelia (*Phacelia viscida*)

Continuing on Coon Creek toward the third bridge, look for the bright red-pink *Lunaria*, *Trillium*, paintbrush, bracken fern, red osier dogwood, thimbleberry and twinberry. Past the third and fifth bridges, look for ocean-spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) At the fourth bridge look for pink flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*).

Beyond the sixth bridge the trail leaves the riparian zone and enters a chaparral with interspersed oak woodland. Look for snowberry's white berries and chaparral honeysuckle's red berries in the fall. Red berries seen on low, trail-border plants in the riparian areas may be poisonous baneberry. Look for trailside *Hoita orbicularis*, and *Rupertia physodes*. After passing the Oats Peak Trail, which goes to the top of the ridge to the north, the trail terminates in a Monterey cypress grove around an long-abandoned house site.



Top left) Pink Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*); (Top right) Ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*); (Bottom left) Round-leaved leather root (*Hoita orbicularis*); (Bottom right) California tea (*Rupertia physodes*)

Returning, at the junction of the Rattlesnake Flats Trail, you could reach the top of the ridge on the north side of Coon Creek, and then descend to the campground. Many choose to join this trail at the Coon Creek Parking lot, and a description of the trail taken from that starting point now follows.

At the Coon Creek parking lot, the Rattlesnake Flats Trail can be reached by turning right at the top of the first descent of the Coon Creek trail. This part of the trail has several coffeeberry and toyon bushes, supports a lot of paintbrush, but is badly invaded by veldt grass. The trail joins the main trail, where you turn right, pass through a drainage and then start climbing the hill on old mudflow deposits. Look for blue dicks, California rush-rose, deer weed and paintbrush as the trail climbs to a small flat area before turning abruptly to the right and continuing to climb. Here you will see the Pecho manzanita, a local endemic, and in the early spring, lots of milkmaids. At a bunch of oaks the trail descends eastward and then climbs a rocky shale slope with bush lupine. At a hairpin turn it crosses the drainage and turns west again. This is a shaded slope with lots of ferns, mosses and some bryophytes. The trail then rounds the hill and passes a pretty population of bush poppy. Crossing another small drainage the trail encounters a large population of *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* before climbing to paralleling the slope into Coon Creek. The trail then descends a chamise-dominated slope into Coon Creek.



(Top left) Pecho manzanita (*Arctostaphylos pechoensis*); (Top right) Bush poppy (*Dendromecon rigida*); (Bottom left) Blue-blossom ceanothus (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*); (Bottom right) Milkmaids (*Cardamine californica*)

# HAZARD CREEK AND EAST BOUNDARY TRAILS

Although there are several ways of getting into the back country of Montana de Oro Park, this selection is fairly representative. Park outside the gate to the Horse Camp at the park entrance. The trail starts in older dune sand and stands of Morro manzanita, a local endemic species, but descends into the shale bedrock where you will see chaparral species, and rather too much eucalyptus. This was planted by speculators in the last century, and the understory is generally devoid of native plants. At the junction of the Manzanita Trail you can go right, cross a stream and make a steep climb to the top of the ridge (where you will turn left at the T-junction to find the East Boundary Trail), or continue on the more gentle Hazard Canyon Trail to the top of the valley, where it turns and climbs to the top of the ridge via a series of switchbacks. This north-facing slope has shade-loving species such as sword fern. The East Boundary Trail starts on the left at the top of the hill.

Once on the East Boundary Trail, you will travel several switch backs in the chaparral, passing senescent stands of Bishop pine, until the gradient flattens out at the head of the Barranca Trail, which drops down the hill into the Islay Creek drainage and trail. Bypass this trail, continuing past the edge of an oak woodland to the left, and the pastures of a private ranch on the right. The trail then ascends to the crest of the ridge in chaparral before descending into a weedy grassland and crossing an ephemeral creek in a small bridge.

The grassland indicates that you have left the shale bedrock and are now on older clay-dominated rocks of the Franciscan Formation. After the bridge the trail climbs toward a rocky outcrop of serpentinite, which supports a very different flora than is seen elsewhere in the park. Look for chocolate lilies, Brewers chorizanthé, cream cups, lance-leaved dudleya, wild pansy, goldfields, cryptantha and other species.

The trail continues, returning to the shale and chaparral and reaching Islay Creek just east of the Barranca Trail intersection.



(Left) Club-haired Mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus*); (Right) Brewer's chorizanthé (*Chorizanthe breweri*)



## BLUFF AND FIELD RANCH TRAILS

These two trails are extremely popular and share some common features. The Bluff Trail starts at the south end of Spooners Cove, running along the cliff top. The 'inland' side of the trail can be very colorful with non-native radish and mustard, but also California poppy. The edge of the bluff has coastal buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*) and coastal golden yarrow (*Eriophyllum staechadifolium*) mixed with California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) as the dominant plants. The trail passes the entrance to Corallina Cove, crosses a bridge, and continues south. There are seasonal wetlands east of the trail as it descends to another cove and a service road. Continue south to the southern end of the park. The trail then climbs to the Coon Creek parking lot. Large fields of California poppy may be encountered.

PG&E's Field Ranch is entered through a gate at the south end of the park, and hikers are confined to the trail and the beach at Coon Creek. The bulk of the coastal terrace has been grazed for a long time, but California poppy does not seem to mind and can have spectacular displays. The narrow strip between the trail and the bluff edge contains the same plants seen on the Bluff Trail, as it was not grazed. There can be a large patch of goldfields at the first headland south of Coon Creek. Disney Point also has a population of wildflowers but is closed to foot traffic.



(Top left) Wild radish on Bluff Trail (*Raphanus sativus*); (Top center) Coast golden yarrow (*Eriophyllum staechadifolium*) on Bluff Trail; (Top right) Coastal buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*); (Bottom left) Goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*) on Field Ranch; (Bottom center) California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) on Field Ranch; (Bottom right) Locoweed (*Astragalus nuttallii*) and Bush lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*) on Field Ranch