17. Methyl Falls Red Area
You have reached the half-way point on your trip along the Nature Trail. The balance of the trip is downhill, which may be good news to many of you. If you are interested in some additional hiking, you may take short side-trips to Upper Falls and Basin Falls, or leave the Waterfall Loop completely, and continue up Swanson Creek along the Contour Trail to Alec Canyon.

18. Tailing Methyl (Minio major)
This non-native plant was introduced into the Swanson Creek area in the late 1800s, to be used as a ground cover around a small cabin that was located near this spot. The plant, also known as periwinkle, has adapted well to this site, and tends to displace native vegetation for growing space. Although not a preferred food, deer will feed on this plant during late summer when browse is scarce.

19. California Nutmeg (Symesia californica)
This tree is not a true nutmeg, but it is actually a member of the yew family. Each leaf is tipped with a sharp green spine. The tree reproduces vigorously from stump sprouts, as does the redwood, but is slow growing. The seeds require a long period after ripening before germination takes place, and many are destroyed by insects or animals.

20. Sticky Monkey Flower (Diplocicus auriculatus)
This perennial shrub gets its name from the fact that the underside of the leaves are rather sticky to the touch, and the shape of the orange flowers resembles the face of a monkey. The plant is typically found in dry, open areas, but will occasionally inhabit other environments. Indians used the young stems and leaves for salad greens.

21. California Laurel (Umbellularia californica)
Other common names given this plant include California bay, Oregon myrtle, and peppermint. Gently rub one of the leaves, notice the spicy smelling aroma which is similar to the true bay used for food seasoning. This is not the same leaf sold commercially. The tree's tiny clustered yellow-green flowers bloom in winter or early spring and ripen into red fruits resembling the olive. The thin flesh turns from green to purple, becoming succulent when mature.

22. Western Sycamore (Platanus racemosa)
The sycamore normally inhabits stream sides. Its bark is smooth and the trunk often leaning. It has broad, deeply lobed leaves that are star-shaped, and a leaf stalk that is expanded at the base to enclose fully the cone-shaped developing bud. Flowers and fruits are in globose clusters distributed along a pendulous, slender stem.

23. Bigleaf Maple (Acer macrophyllum)
Like the sycamore, the big leaf maple tends to be found growing along streams and in moist canyons. The large, up to 10 inch deeply lobed leaves, are the largest leaves of any American maples. The tree is particularly attractive in the fall, when these leaves turn yellow and orange, and begin to drop from the tree.

24. California Sage (Artemisia californica)
These shrubs are found on open hillsides or in mixed chaparral. Numerous tiny grey leaves emit a strong odor when crushed. It is said that miners laid sprays of the sage to drive away fleas, and the Spanish-Californians used it in the form of a strong wash to bathe wounds and swellings.

25. Canyon Live Oak (Quercus chrysolepis)
This species is also known as a maid oak, or iron oak, because its heavy and hard wood was used for the head of mauls by the settlers. When fully grown it is the most massive of western oaks. The canyon live oak is usually found at elevations above the range of the coast live oak. Shrubbery forms are common in chaparral areas.

26. California Buckeye (Aesculus californica)
The buckeye tree is located on the hill above you. The buckeye is one of the showiest and most beautiful native tree species because of the great masses of creamy white flowers that appear on long, erect spires during May and June. The leaves appear early in the spring and soon after flowering, turn brown. They fall off in August or early September, probably as a means of protecting the tree from drought. The green buckeye pods continue to enlarge even after the leaves fall, and eventually split open to release the large, tough-coated shiny-brown "buckeye" seed. Indians made flour from the buckeye fruits after extracting the poison. The nectar from buckeye flowers is poisonous to bees.

27. Tree of Heaven (Ailanthus altissima)
The tree of heaven is one of the many species of plants found in the Santa Cruz Mountains which is not native to the area. California has approximately 1,000 species of introduced (exotic) plants, most of which are annuole of Old World origin. Exotics are not representative of the natural California flora. Concerned about exotics include their aggressiveness in displacing natives. If an exotic species displaces the native vegetation in an area, wildlife that utilized the native species for food and/or cover, may be unable to adapt to the introduced plant. Native species are therefore, best adapted for the area in which they live, and over the long term will provide a diversity of habitats for wildlife and human enjoyment.

Your tour of the Waterfall Loop is now complete. Hopefully you have enjoyed your hike. Should you have any additional questions, please contact a park ranger.
Welcome to the Waterfall Loop. As you walk this mile route along Swanson Creek, you will be introduced to some of the plants that make thankful our beautiful canyon. The hot, dry, and often foggy trees, and cool, wet winters of this part of the Santa Cruz Mountains produce the mixed evergreen and deciduous forest types characteristic of the Park.

For those of you with a keen amount of time, the hike around the trail can be made in about 40 minutes. For a leisurely hike with time out for enjoying the full beauty of the natural beauty of the trail and adjacent waterfalls, you should allow approximately one hour for the trip. The trail gains 500 feet in elevation and is moderately steep. Wear appropriate footwear.

The trail begins near the fire collection station of the camp-ground entrance, or you may access the trail from the headwater of the Black Oak Group Picnic Area. Parking is available in day-use areas. Picnics are permitted at this location.

In order to protect the beauty of the natural environment, we ask you not to remove anything from its place. All features in county parks are protected.

WATERFALLS

When streams, creeks or rivers flow over precipices and plunge downward, waterfalls are formed. The waterfall in Uvas Canyon's creeks comes from a combination of rainfall and springs. The various springs above and in Uvas Canyon are the creeks' sources or heads. The creeks are fed by these springs, which flow through the headwaters. At first, headwaters flow in tiny narrow channels called rills. Rills travel downhill and come together forming wider, deeper channels called brooks. Brooks combine to form streams or creeks. Sudden descents of water from higher to lower elevations create waterfalls in Uvas Canyon. In many places, waterfalls are formed when a creek crosses a layer of soft, resistant rock and softer rock downstream is worn away by the flow of water. This leaves a steep drop in the creek's channel, causing waterfalls. Sometimes other geological forces, such as erosion, may form waterfalls. The path of the stream, as well as causing waterfalls. Differences in formations cause waterfalls to vary in appearance from narrow and high to wide and low.

The Waterfall Loop is located along Swanson Creek. This is a year-round stream which flows though a forest of plant and animal life. The plants living along this creek are here because abundant water is available. It is a riparian community. Flowing water's influence on the stream side community extends to the entire community as about forty percent of the mammal and reptile species in the Western United States depend on riparian habitats for some or all of their needs. More than 80% of amphibians depend on riparian habitats.

The terrestrial plants in riparian communities are critical to the animals in a stream ecosystem. Fish use overhanging vegetation for cover from predators. Shade from trees, sycamores and maples keeps stream temperatures cool in the summer, which is important to growth and development of young fish. Leaves and other debris fall into streams and provides an important source of nutrients for insects and other stream invertebrates. Riparian settings attract wildlife, offering favorable micro-climates combined with abundant resources. The variety of plants growing along streams provides a menu of food items; foliage, flowers, seeds and nuts are all forms for the basis of some animals diet. Insects abound and the food web can be complex and large by the size the top predators visit a riparian site.

Use of This Guide

The more common plants along the Waterfall Loop have been marked with numbered spots that correspond to the following listed description. None of these plants is that not covered in the descriptions, a park ranger may be able to supply you with information about the plant. Enjoy your hike!

1. Tanbark Oak (Ulothrysus doriasus)

Although the tanbark oak produces acorns after the second growing season, it is not a tree widely distributed in the redwood region, and back from the coast where they associate with madrone, California laurel, and Douglas fir. Native Americans of the California Coast Range depended on the tanbark for food. Through a meticulous, grinding, and washing process, they were able to produce a fine flour. Later settlers used an extract from the bark in the leather tanning process.

2. Coyote Bush (Baccharis spp.)

Also known as chapparal bush, the coyote bush is a common plant of the California Coast Ranges and valleys. When in bloom, the stems are covered with large, globe-shaped, golden-yellow flowers. The plant's long stems as arrow shafts by scaling the stems in water and then rolling them on flat rocks.

3. Madrone (Arbutus menziesii)

The madder's green leaves and red bark, and its bell-shaped white flowers are similar to those of the mountain-ash, birds enjoy the orange-red berries that form from the flowers. The madrone's bark was used by the Indians in a tea to cure stomach aches and tooth ails, and made into a lotion for cuts and sores.

4. White Alder (Alnus rhombifolia)

The alder is the earliest of all streamside trees to bloom. Their leaves do not have the dark red petioles which the Indians are said to have used as an antiseptic for wounds. The bark on mature trees is thick, dark brown, and deeply furrowed. The flowers & is one of the more common trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains growing from near sea level to about 2000 feet in elevation. The Indians used bark from this tree, and it is commonly planted as an ornamental. It is perhaps best known as the most widely used Christmas tree throughout the western states.

5. Blackberry (Rubus lacinius)

This member of the rose family can be recognized by the thorny upright, elongated clusters of berries. The leaves are sometimes home to large black flies that are used by the Indians for food. The plant is often found near water and used as an ornamental.

6. Poison Oak (Toxicodendron diversilobum)

Poison oak is a versatile plant. It forms shrubs 2 feet or more in height, or may be a woody vine climbing up the trunks of trees, as is this poison oak plant in front of you. Poison oak grows very abundantly in all sorts of habitats. It is not to be confused with poison ivy or poison sumac, which are native to the eastern United States. Contact with the poison oak's oils can cause a rash on the skin. The most serious threat is from the red oil released into the air. Poison oak's dark green leaves turn brilliant red in the fall before they drop. Standed brown stalks remain through the winter before new leaves sprout in the spring.

7. Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus)

In the late summer you may see a patch of thimbleberry bushes. The 3 to 7 inch wide leaves are hairy and soft. The thimbleberry has white flowers and a soft, bright red, sweet berry that resembles a thimble in shape. The thimbleberry is common in several habitats; coastal scrub, redwood forest, and riparian alluvium.

8. Coastal Wood Fern (Dryopteris aquatica)

This species is commonly found on wooded mountain slopes, mostly below 5,000 feet. The coastal wood fern is rare found in dense redwood forests. The blades of the fern are slightly leathery, and twice pinnate or nearly so. The leaf is large, close, and in two rows.

9. Poison Oak and Blackberry

Now is your chance to compare these two species close together. The leaves of Poison oak are typically composed of 3 leaflets, which are variously toothed, lobed, or rarely entire. When leaves emerge in the spring they are shiny green. The lobes turn a beautiful red in autumn. The poison oak's flowers are present from April to May. They are small, greenish white, and drooping. The fruit is tan or whitish, a smooth, dry, drupe about 1/4" wide, falling soon after maturity. The blackberry's leaves are also composed of 3 leaflets, which are darker and more sharply toothed. The plant has spines on the stems, petals, and leaflets. Leaf color is typically a dull, greenish yellow than that of Poison oak. The plant does not lose its leaves in the fall as does Poison oak, but is evergreen. The blackberry's flowers is showy, the petals are white to pink, the fleshy, apple-like drupe; white or black in color when mature.

10. Douglas Fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii)

This species is not a true fir. The cones of true firs stand upright on the branches, whereas the Douglas fir has hanging cones. The bark on young trees is smooth, greenish-grey, and marked with bellies containing sap. The bark on older trees is grey to brown, ribbed, and furrowed. The Douglas fir is one of the most common trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains growing from near sea level to about 2000 feet in elevation. The Indians used bark from this tree, and it is commonly planted as an ornamental. It is perhaps best known as the most widely used Christmas tree throughout the western states.

11. Natural Spring

This project has developed from the large amount of water that is stored in the hillside. As with most springs, the water is pure, so please be careful to keep your distance, and not contaminate it.

12. Golden Rock Fern (Phyrgiopodium triangulare)

These small to medium-sized ferns usually inhabit rock-shadowed slopes from 100 to 5000 feet in elevation. The leaves are erect to drooping, leathery green, and glorious (dancing hairs) above. The underside is covered with a whitish to yellowish powder, hence the common name. Ferns differ from seed-bearing plants in their method of reproduction by producing from a single cell. These ferns reproduce by spores, which are one-celled asexually reproductive units. Fossil records indicate ferns have been a part of the earth's vegetation for millions of years. The living forms are thought to be the most perfect compared to the countless number that once flourished.

13. Sword Fern (Polystichum munitum)

The sword fern is one of the most common ferns of the California Coast Range. It is widely distributed in damp woods generally below 2,500 feet. The sword fern generally can be found on drier sites than the other fern seem on the trail. The leaves along the frond grow a small but distinct "hilt" on the upper edge near the main rib. This probably accounts for the common name "sword fern." The unusual "spots" that form on the bottom side of the frond are actually scars from old fronds that contain the spores. Spores fall to the ground and germinate, eventually producing a new fern plant.

14. Coastal Redwood (Sequoia sempervirens)

Growing ring counts on some of the largest coast redwoods have indicated ages over 2,000 years old. One of the most notable characteristics of the coast redwood is its ability to survive fires. Its bark is thick, soft, fibrous in texture, and reddish brown in color. On old trees it is resistant to fire, and the bark contains no flammable sap. Trees that have lost all their branches died by fire often stand green long enough to top bottom, producing what are known on burned areas as "fire columns." Redwoods produce hundreds of tiny cones, but the seeds from these cones don't germinate well. The tree reproduces most readily from root sprouts.

15. Swanson Creek

Before you enter the Swanson Creek, Creeks or streams are described according to permanence of flow. Permanent streams like Swanson Creek flow all year long. Intermittent streams (like the creek at triple falls) dry up during portions of the year interrupted streams (like the creek at Indian falls) flow underground in places. Water drains slowly out of the Earth. Solar act as a sponge holding enormous quantities of water for days or weeks after a storm. Much of the water is released gradually from the soil into the streams. Streams and rivers are connected together with ground water, drains through springs and seeps and keeps streams flowing even when it has not rained for months.

16. Rose Wood (Rosa gymnocarpa)

This member of the rose family is armed with straight, slender spines. It is commonly shrunken in the shaded woods of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The pretty rose-colored flowers are showy, but only July 6, the Indians made a load of the rose to test it. Seeds were cooked for muscle pain, and the fruit was made into a jelly.