

14. Burned Out Tree

The fibrous bark of an old Coast Redwood is sometimes a foot thick. Its resistance to rot, fire and insects are well known. Directly under the bark is the tree's living layer, called the cambium layer. If this tree's cambium layer had not been extensively damaged by fire it might have continued to live and grow. Many early wanderers used these burned out redwoods as temporary shelter.

15. Tree Down

Many years ago this mighty redwood fell and it has become the source of life for many other plants. As this tree slowly decomposes it will supply life-giving nutrients to the variety of plants growing on it. This is the reason we ask you not to gather wood in the State Parks. Downed wood builds the soil and becomes a source of vital nutrients for other plants. These downed "nursery logs" can mean life to such plants as the Western Hemlock and Huckleberry.

16. Storm Damage

High winds are infrequent in the redwood forest, but when wind does occur it is not uncommon to find a redwood that has been blown over. Redwoods have no center tap roots; instead they have a very shallow, wide spreading root system. The entire root system is usually less than ten feet deep. The root systems radiate outward and intertwine with those of surrounding trees, this is a redwood's support against falling. . .the "buddy system." This fallen giant is decomposing, the process that will supply nutrients for new plants.

17. Save-the-Redwoods League

In 1918, a group of philanthropists formed the "Save-the-Redwoods League." These people saw the great redwood forests of California being threatened and exploited. They were determined to preserve from extinction the remaining areas of old growth. Of the original 2 million acres of old growth, today only about 8% remain and less than 4% is protected in parks. Over the years the League has generated donations from concerned individuals. . .and the work continues.

18. Fern Valley (Photo and rest stop)

This is a nice spot to stop and photograph a "crown" of mighty redwoods that have grown from a common root system. How very small we are compared to the size of these trees! Relax a moment and enjoy the quiet coolness of the redwood forest before you continue on.

19. Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)

The bark of this Alder isn't red so why call it Red Alder? This name comes from the wood which turns reddish brown when exposed to air. The great natural value of this tree is that it moves in swiftly to establish itself in disturbed areas (i.e. along trails and creeks, and logged over lands.) It grows quickly but is relatively short lived reaching maturity at 60-80 years. The Red Alder inhibits erosion, enriches the soil by fixing nitrogen and provides shelter from sun and wind for other tree seedlings. The tree's small "cones" look somewhat similar to the Coast Redwood's.

20. Most of us can find a cousin to this tree in our kitchen. Perhaps the distinct aroma of the leaves when gently rubbed can serve as a clue. Anyone for spaghetti? This plant has four common names one of which is Pepperwood. We call it by the name listed at Stop No. 2.

21. The trees that make up much of this grove are common along the Pacific Northwest from California to Washington. The sharp needles and paper-like cones are characteristic of this evergreen. Grab hold of some of the needles to see how they feel. Prickly aren't they? What name would *you* give to this tree? The scientific and common names are listed at Stop No. 5.

22. Before going underneath this fallen log see if you can recognize some of the plants that are obtaining nutrients from this "nursery log." You have seen them or will see them on the trail as you continue.

- Answers: Stop No. 3
Stop No. 5
Stop No. 6
Stop No. 11

23. Trees in Creek (*Fish Habitat*)

Large trees that fall into Prairie Creek are an important element of the stream habitat. The trees provide homes for salmon, steelhead, coastal cut-throat trout, and other creatures. Pools formed by the logs become nursery areas for young fish, providing protection, food and comfort.

24. Prairie Creek

As you pass over this bridge, linger a moment to enjoy the beauty of Prairie Creek. Prairie Creek drains many acres of forest land. During summer months it is small and quiet. With an average of 75 inches of fall and winter rain, it rises and rushes to the ocean. From October through December the salmon return to the creek for the annual spawning process while steelhead usually arrive from January through February.

25. Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)

Salmonberry is quite common throughout the moist climate of the Pacific Northwest. It is a shrub that grows from 3 to 12 feet tall. Its dense growth and small thorns can sometimes impede hikers and cross country travelers. Salmonberry presents a purple flower in April and May, making it the earliest berry of the spring. The orange "salmon-colored" fruit resembles a raspberry.

Conclusion

It is our hope here at Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park that your hike on this nature trail has enriched your appreciation and knowledge of the Redwood Forest region. We invite you to enjoy other features of the park by hiking the variety of other trails. Information can be obtained at the park visitor center.

Note: Special thanks to CSU Chico Intern Student Gerald Aus.



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PRAIRIE CREEK
REDWOODS
STATE PARK

Self-Guided
Nature Trail

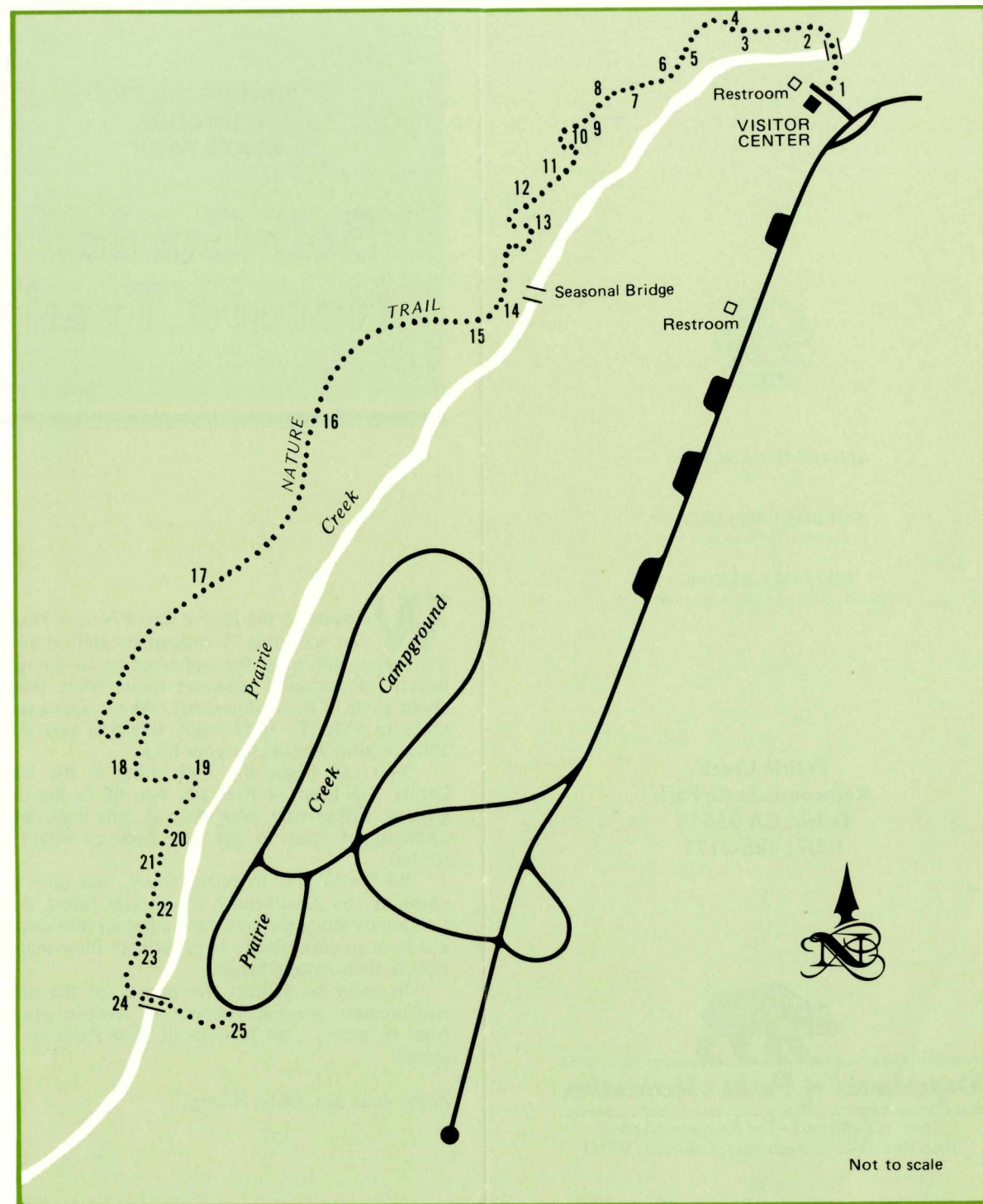
Welcome to the *Prairie Creek Nature Trail*. As you walk this 1½ mile moderately strenuous trail, you will have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of a coastal redwood forest while learning about some of the features that make it such a special place to visit. To fully enjoy this trail you should allow around 2 hours for your hike.

You can begin the trail either at the Visitor Center Trailhead or near site No. 65 in the campground. Either way, plan on a ½ mile walk on the campground road to get you back to where you started.

We invite you to relax, enjoy, and open your senses as you pass through the ancient forest. As the trail winds along the creek and adjacent hillsides, you will have an opportunity to experience these majestic trees in their natural habitat.

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

Enjoy your day. Good Hiking!



1. Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)

These evergreen shrubs grow from 3 to 20 feet in height. They have large leathery dark green leaves. In April through June, the large pink flowers add to the usual deep greens of the redwood forest. The name Rhododendron comes from the Greek word meaning rose tree. The Rhododendron is one of the most beautiful of our native shrubs.

2. California Laurel (*Umbellularia californica*)

Other common names given this plant are California Bay, Bay-leaf, Oregon Myrtle, and Pepperwood. Grand old Laurel trees reach an estimated age of 200-300 years. Gently rub one of the leaves. . .notice the pervading aroma which is similar to the true bay used to flavor a pot of spaghetti. This however is not the same leaf sold commercially, but it can impart a nice flavor of its own.

3. Evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*)

This evergreen shrub with small, shiny, stiff leaves is one of the dominant cover plants in the Redwood region. In the spring the Huckleberry has pale-pink, bell-shaped flowers. It can be found in shaded areas of the coast from British Columbia to northern California. Animals, such as coyote, elk, bears, birds and mice are fond of the small berries.

4. Vine Maple (*Acer circinatum*)

This tree gets its name from its vine-like habit of sprawling along the ground, sometimes for as much as 30 feet. It lacks a sturdy root structure so it rarely reaches higher than 35 feet. In the autumn the tree displays brilliant red and gold colors. Vine Maple grows abundantly in disturbed areas such as along trails or near creeks. It provides excellent food for elk and deer who occasionally stray into the forest.

5. Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*)

The Sitka Spruce grows the largest of all the native spruces. In the redwood region it may reach a height of 130-200 feet. The wood is soft and light weight, but extremely strong and is adaptable to many uses. It has been used for musical instruments and, during World War II, for making airplane parts. Native Americans use the tough, flexible roots for weaving baskets. The flakey bark of the Sitka Spruce looks much like a potato chip, and one touch will prove the needles are sharp and prickly. Notice the distinctive papery cones.

6. Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)

Notice the leathery leaves of this shrub, a common plant in the Pacific Northwest. Salal can be barely 6 inches tall or grow to a bush of 5 feet or more. It grows successfully in both dark forest and open coastal area. The urn-shaped flowers of the Salal bloom from May through July and are followed by juicy blue-black berries. Coastal Native Americans mashed the berries so that they could be dried into small cakes. These cakes were then dipped in whale or seal oil and eaten. Early settlers learned to make syrup and pies from the Salal berries.

7. Redwood Sorrel (*Oxalis oregana*)

Although the leaves of this small ground-hugging plant resemble those of a clover, they are not related. Sorrel leaves fold together at night and on cloudy days, and droop when exposed to strong sunlight. The underside of mature leaves turn a deep purple. The color of the flowers vary from purple to white. The leaves are edible and have a "tangy" taste caused by oxalic acid in the plant. For this reason Sorrel is sometimes called Sour Grass.

8. Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)

All around you stand examples of the tallest trees in the world. Some reach 360 feet in height and may live to an age of 2000 years or more. Redwoods thrive in the dense fog and high precipitation of this coastal area. Walk up to the base of this giant and feel the rough, fibrous, furrowed bark. Redwood bark is non-living material that provides excellent insulation against fire, and resists insect invaders and fungus. This ability is unique among trees and may well account for the redwood's long term success. Redwoods produce hundreds of tiny cones, but the seeds from these cones don't germinate well. The tree reproduces most readily from root sprouts.

9. Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)

Seeds of the Western Hemlock sprout readily whether they land on soil or on a life-supporting "nursery log." Log sprouted seedlings eventually deplete the "nursery log's" nutrients and its roots straddle the log to find soil. Eventually, the log rots away leaving the Western Hemlock standing high on its roots. Such Hemlocks are frequently know as "Octopus Trees." Western Hemlocks are hardy and can withstand the darkness of a redwood forest. Once established, they are moderate to fast growing trees that live several hundred years.

10. Nature's Sound Proofing

As you walk past these Coastal Redwoods, stop to notice how the trees muffle the sounds of the stream below and the highway traffic. The dense vegetation around you and the massive size of the redwoods act as a noise barrier. Nature's sound-proofing makes the redwood forests peaceful and quiet places.

11. Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*)

The large evergreen ferns that you see around you are abundant throughout the coast redwood region. The leaflets along the frond have a small but distinct "hilt" on the upper edge near the main rib. This probably accounts for the common name "sword fern." Note the rows of small dots on the underside of some of the leaflets. These are called sori and they contain the spores of the fern. Ferns can grow from a small plant form or they can produce from underground stems. Sword Fern is but one of nine species of fern found in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. It is among the easiest to identify.

12. Deer Fern (*Blechnum spicant*)

The small fern on the bank of the trail is Deer Fern. This small fern has two, distinct fronds; those which are fertile (produce spores) and those which are sterile (produce food only). The sterile fronds are evergreen and grow in a tight circle drooping outward close to the ground. Fertile fronds are tall, spindly and grow erect from the center of the plant. This fern is frequently eaten by deer and elk.

13. Tanoak or Tanbark Oak (*Lithocarpus densiflora*)

Tanoak is a slow-growing tree that may live to be 350 years of age. Individual Tanoaks frequently reach 70 to 90 feet, and some have topped 150 feet. The Tanoak is not a true oak, but after the second growing season does produce acorns. Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest depended on the Tanoak for food. Through a meticulous and tedious 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. Tanoak withstands more moisture than most hardwoods which probably accounts for its success in this area.