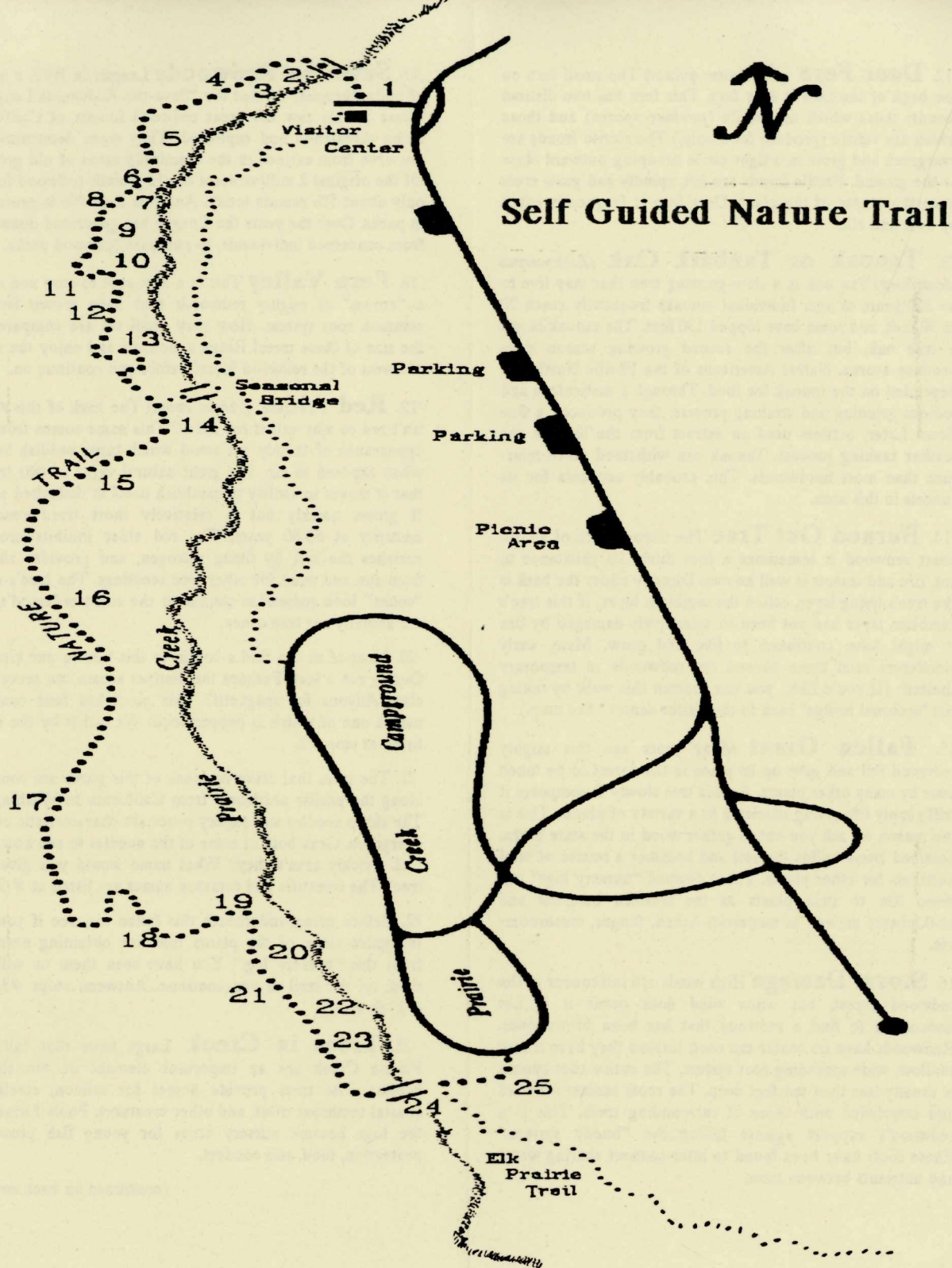




24. Prairie Creek As you pass over this bridge, linger a moment to enjoy the beauty of Prairie Creek. Prairie Creek drains many acres of forest land. During summer months it is small and quiet. But, with an average of 75 inches of fall and winter rain, it rises and rushes to the ocean. From October through December the salmon return to Prairie 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 make hiking cross country difficult. 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.

*

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

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Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park

Orick, CA 95555

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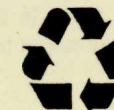
Published by

**North Coast Redwood
Interpretive Association**

A non-profit organization serving state parks since 1976.

Special thanks to Ranger Gerald Ann

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Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park Self-guided Nature Trail

Welcome to the Prairie Creek Nature Trail. As you walk this 1.5 mile trail you will have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of a coastal redwood forest at its finest while learning about some of the features that make it such a special place. To fully enjoy this trail, you should allow about 2 hours. You can begin the trail either at the Visitor Center Trailhead or near campsite #65 in the campground. Either way, plan on an additional 1/2 mile walk on the campground road to get you back to where you started., You can shorten the trail by crossing the seasonal bridge located near stop #14. Follow the trail back to the Visitor Center.

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 and the natural environment, we ask you not to remove anything from its place...all features in state parks are protected. Enjoy your walk.

Good hiking!!

1. **Rhododendron** (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) These evergreen shrubs grow from 3 to 20 feet in height. They have large leathery dark green leaves. From April through June the large pink flowers add a splash of color 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 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, bear, birds and mice are fond of the small berries.

4. **Vine Maple** (*Acer circinatum*) This tree gets its name from its vine-like sprawling along the ground. It lacks a sturdy root structure so it rarely reaches higher than 35 feet. All summer the leaves are a vibrant green followed in fall by brilliant reds and golds. Vine maple grows abundantly along trails and 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 a little like potato chips, 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 areas. The urn-shaped flowers of the salal bloom from May through July and are followed by juicy blue-black berries. Local native Americans mashed the berries to make small cakes which were dipped in whale or seal oil and eaten. Early settlers made salal berry syrup and pies.

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. For this reason sorrel is sometimes called sour grass.

8. **Coast Redwood** (*Sequoia sempervirens*) All around you stand examples of the tallest trees in the world. Some reach over 360 feet in height and 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 fibrous furrowed bark. Redwood bark is non-living material that provides excellent insulation against fire, and resists insect invasion 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 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 known 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 coast redwoods, notice how the trees muffle the sounds of the stream below and the highway traffic. The dense vegetation around and the massive size of the redwoods act as a noise barrier. Nature's sound proofing makes the redwood forest peaceful and quiet.

11. **Sword Fern** (*Polystichum munitum*) The large evergreen ferns that you see around you are abundant throughout the coastal 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. 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** (*Belchnum spicant*) The small fern on the bank of the trail is deer fern. This 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. Deer fern is frequently eaten by deer and elk.

13. **Tanoak or Tanbark Oak** (*Lithocarpus densiflora*) Tan oak 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 produced a fine flour. Later, settlers used an extract from the bark in the leather tanning process. Tanoak can withstand more moisture than most hardwoods. This probably accounts for its success in this area.

14. **Burned Out Tree** The fibrous bark of an old coast redwood is sometimes a foot thick. Its resistance to rot, fire and insects is 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 so extensively damaged by fire it might have continued to live and grow. Many early wanderers used these burned out redwoods as temporary shelter. (If you'd like, you can shorten this walk by taking the "seasonal bridge" back to the visitor center. See map.)

15. **Fallen Giant** Many years ago this mighty redwood fell and gave up its place in the forest to be taken over by many other plants. As this tree slowly decomposes it will supply life-giving nutrients to a variety of plants. 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 as well as numerous lichen, fungus, mushrooms etc.

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 root; instead they have a very shallow, wide spreading root system. The entire root system is usually less than ten feet deep. The roots radiate outward and intertwine with those of surrounding trees. This is a redwood's support against falling...the "buddy system." These roots have been found to inter-connect sharing water and nutrients between trees.

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 redwood forest, only about 5% remain today. And less than 4% is protected in parks. Over the years the League has generated donations from concerned individuals, to purchase redwood parks.

18. **Fern Valley** This is a nice spot to stop and study 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 appearance of freshly cut 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. 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, but are actually not true cones.

20. Most of us can find a cousin to this tree in our kitchen. Gently rub a leaf. Perhaps the distinct aroma 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 #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 papery 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 this tree? The scientific and common names are listed at # 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: stops #3, #5, #6, & #11.

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

(continued on back cover)