

Chumash Trail

THE TRAIL: The Chumash Trail is approximately 2.5 miles in length, extending from the northern end of Flanagan Drive to the top of the ridge 1.3 miles north of Rocky Peak. To get to the trailhead, take Yosemite Avenue north from the 118 Freeway in Simi Valley. Flanagan Drive is the first right turn north of Alamo Street. Flanagan Drive forms the western boundary of the Chumash Natural Park, which includes beautiful sandstone rock formations, complete with caves. To access the trail, park along the eastern side of Flanagan Drive as close to the northern end as possible.

The trail is on property that is owned by both the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Rancho Simi Recreation & Park District. The Chumash Trail was constructed between November 1989 and January 1990. The trail is maintained by the Rancho Simi Trail Blazers and patrolled by the Volunteer Trail Safety Service, which are volunteer organizations associated with the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. If you have any questions about either of these organizations, you can call the Volunteer Coordinator with the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District at (805) 584-4453.

GEOLOGY: The Chumash Trail begins in a clayey shale and siltstone, with some interbedding of sandstone strata of the Santa Susana Formation. This formation is marine and of the Paleocene Epoch, which was deposited roughly 60-64 million years ago. The formation is made up largely of turbidites, which were deposited at depths by turbidity currents in the form of submarine slides from the continental shelf into the depths of the ocean.

After the first quarter of a mile up the mountain at the first level area, a wide stratum of large cobbles is encountered, which is the Simi Conglomerate of the Santa Susana Formation. The Simi Conglomerate at this location is marine, and was deposited as submarine conglomerates at the mouths of a deep sea canyon. Still further up the trail are some large sandstone outcroppings at the headwaters of the White Oak drainage. The sandstone includes caves and are also part of the Santa Susana Formation. After crossing the sandstone stratum, you will again cross a wide zone of the Simi Conglomerates. Watch your step there, especially on the way down.

Within the next half mile the Chatsworth Formation is entered. That formation continues to the top of the ridges. The Chatsworth Formation is composed primarily of light gray, fine to medium grained sandstone.

The sandstone, when exposed to air for many years, weathers to a tan color as a result of the oxidation of iron rich minerals. The sandstone strata range from a few feet to 20-30 feet thick. Occasional beds of siltstone and cobbles are present on the western margins. The formation was deposited in the deep ocean, at a depth of 4,000-5,000 feet, by turbidity currents. Those turbidity currents were often a half mile or more in width and tens of miles in length. As a result, few fossils survived the grinding action of the long journey into the ocean depths. Some fossils, in the form of organic debris, are present along the trail beyond Hamilton Saddle. In between these catastrophic events, there were quiet periods without turbidity currents when silt and clay particles rained down from the surface of the ocean as fines carried out to sea from heavy runoff from the land. Those fines became the siltstone strata.

The formation is part of the North Pacific Plate, which is moving to the northwest at a current rate of about 2.5 inches per year. Because of the collision with the North American Plate along the San Andreas Fault, the margin of the North Pacific Plate has been uplifted and locally tilted to the west by 25-45 degrees.

Once one tops the ridge at the trail's intersection with the Rocky Peak Fire Road, you may wish to head north on the Rocky Peak Fire Road a few hundred feet to the beginning of the next road cut. The southern branch of the Simi-Santa Rosa fault crosses the ridge at that point. The fault is marked by offset beds and shattered bedrock.

PLANT LIFE: The Chumash Trail begins in grasslands, moves quickly into coastal sage scrub, and finally into the chaparral plant community. The grasslands are made up primarily of introduced grasses from the Mediterranean Basin. Those annual grasses have displaced the perennial grasses which dominated our grasslands before the coming of the Spanish. These grasslands include occasional coast live oaks and valley oaks. The grasses include ripgut and red bromes, foxtail, wild oats, and soft chess, among others. Other plants include Mediterranean and black mustards, yellow star thistle, laurel sumac, sweet fennel, and prickly lettuce.

The coastal sage scrub includes black and white sages, California sagebrush, California buckwheat, purple nightshade, giant rye (California's largest native grass), purple needle-grass, laurel sumac, sugar bush, cudweed aster, California everlasting, yucca, yerba santa, Mediterranean and other mustards, deerweed, golden yarrow, soap plant, star lily, California peony, bush mallow and many perennial species. Of special note is the Catalina mariposa lily, which blooms in the spring and is present in the grasslands, coastal sage scrub and the chaparral plant communities. The yellow mariposa and Plummer's mariposa lilies are also present.

The yucca was called *ta'apu* by the Ventureño Chumash, who named the premier village in the area after the plant. That village was located up Tapo Canyon and is the source of the name "Tapo." Tapo canyon, on both sides of the Santa Susana Mountains, were the trails to *Ta'apu*.

The chaparral grows at higher elevations than does the coastal sage scrub with the same exposure to the sun and on north facing slopes. Characterized by evergreen shrubs with small hard leaves, chaparral is a fire-climax vegetation, successfully resprouting from root crowns after fires. From mid-summer through late fall mature chaparral is extremely dry and loaded with volatile hydrocarbon compounds. When ignited, especially during Santa Ana winds, devastating wildfires can result.

Some chaparral species found along the trail include chamise, hoary-leaved ceanothus, California mountain mahogany, yerba santa, toyon, hollyleaf cherry, redberry, laurel sumac, sugar bush, scrub oak, yellow bush monkeyflower, Eastwood manzanita (near the top), silk-tassel bush (also near the top), Santa Susana tarplant, rose snapdragon, blue and scarlet larkspurs, golden yarrow, chia, large-flowered phacelia, caterpillar phacelia, and woolly bluecurls. Poison oak is present at only one place along the trail more than half way up.

The Santa Susana tarplant is the only plant with a local name. It is listed as "rare" by the state and is found in the rocky cave area above the White Oak drainage and in places along the last one third of a mile from the top.

ANIMAL LIFE: Animals that may be seen along the trail include: birds, such as turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls, poor-wills, California quail, mourning doves, Anna's hummingbirds, common flickers, scrub jays, mockingbirds, common crows, common ravens, California towhees, and white-crowned and English sparrows; reptiles, such as southern Pacific rattlesnakes, San Diego gopher snakes, California king snakes, San Diego/California horned lizards, San Diego alligator lizards, and the Great Basin fence and California side-blotched lizards; and mammals, such as brush rabbits, desert cottontails, California ground squirrels, Botta's pocket gophers, agile kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky woodrats, coyotes, ringtail cats, southern California weasels, striped skunks, mountain lions, bobcats and mule deer.

While mountain lions are present in the hills around Simi Valley, encounters are unlikely, but you should always be alert. It is best that you do not hike alone and that you keep small children close at hand. Rattlesnakes may be encountered — Stay on the trail and avoid them when they are encountered — Be observant and never try to handle them. Do not handle any wildlife, including bats, even if they appear to be injured or sick. Remember, you are visitors to their homes.

**Mike Kuhn,
Executive Chair,
Rancho Simi Trail Blazers**

*Please see **Trail Safety Tips** at this trail's main page for more info.*

