

Hummingbird Creek Trail

THE TRAIL: The Hummingbird Trail begins 0.2 miles north of the 118 Freeway on the southern side of Kuehner Drive at the eastern end of Simi Valley. It extends down along Hummingbird Creek, crosses the creek just north of the 118 Freeway and then climbs through beautiful sandstone rock formations for a total length of 2.0 miles and an elevation gain of over 1,000 feet where it intersects the Rocky Peak Fire Road some 0.8 miles north of the Rocky Peak Interchange of the freeway. At that point, a bench awaits the tired climber. One may continue up the Rocky Peak Fire Road to Rocky Peak (1.7 miles) or go down the Rocky Peak Fire Road to the Rocky Peak Interchange. The trail is a favorite of mountain bikers, who prefer to go down the trail. Hikers should be on the lookout for over zealous bikers, and bikers need to respect the safety of hikers.

THE GEOLOGY: The Hummingbird Trail begins at the northeastern edge of the Chatsworth Formation, which is the name that geologists have given to the massive sandstone formations at the eastern end of Simi Valley. The formation is of Cretaceous age, locally greater than 65.8 million years. The formation itself extended to the end of the Cretaceous Period, at which time about half of the types of the animal life on this planet became extinct, including dinosaurs, due to the impact of a large meteorite where the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico is now located. At some point the Chatsworth Formation was uplifted above sea level, and the upper portion of the formation was eroded away before new marine sediments were superimposed on the resulting landscape.

The Chatsworth Formation is composed primarily of light gray, fine to medium grained sandstone strata, which are from a few feet to 20-30 feet in thickness. These beds have weathered to a tan color as a result of oxidation of iron rich minerals in the sandstone when exposed to air. Occasional beds of siltstone and cobbles are present. Those turbidity currents were often a half mile or more in width and ten or more miles in length. As a result, few fossils survived the grinding action of the long journey into the ocean depths. In between these catastrophes, the formation was deposited in the deep ocean, at a depth of 4,000 to 5,000 feet, by turbidity currents, i.e., massive submarine landslides, from the continental shelf into submarine canyons. There were quiet periods without turbidity currents when silt and clay particles rained down from the surface of the ocean as fines carried long distances in the ocean from heavy runoff from the land. These 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 locally has been uplifted and tilted to the northwest from 20-40 degrees.

There are many joints, vertical to the bedding plains, in the sandstone strata. The shape of a pitched roof of a house can be seen in the rock from the freeway west of Kuhner Drive. These joints, combined with the contacts between strata and cavernous weathering of the sandstone have resulted in fascinating rock formations, including deep crevasses and caves.

PLANT LIFE: Three plant communities can be observed along the trail. On the warmer and drier south facing slopes, Coastal Sage Scrub can be found. This community is made up of largely exotic grasses from the Mediterranean Basin, such as wild oats, ripgut and red bromes, soft chess, foxtail, and golden top, yucca, laurel sumac, California sagebrush, bush sunflower, yerba santa, California buckwheat, deerweed, bush mallow, black sage and redberry.

Chaparral is found on north-facing slopes. This community is made up of evergreen shrubs with small hard leaves. This is fire-climax vegetation in that the plants successfully sprout from root masses following brush fires. Characteristic plants include chamise, hoary-leafed ceanothus, California mountain mahogany, toyon, laurel sumac, bush monkey flower, hollyleaf cherry, scrub oak, lemonade berry, sugar bush, and poison oak.

The Riparian Plant Community is present along Hummingbird Creek. These water loving plants include arroyo and sandbar willows, Fremont cottonwoods, arundo grass (a Mediterranean import, this giant grass chokes out native species and does not provide habitat for animals), yerba mansa, mugwort, bulrush, juncus, water cress, Mexican elderberry, poison oak, and stinging nettle. One Canary Island date palm is present in the tributary that comes in from the northeast.

Many plants can result in painful encounters and dermatitis. Poison oak is the bane of outdoor users. It is present along Hummingbird Creek and a couple of hundred yards after leaving the creek. Poison oak is also present near the top of the trail. The trail purposely follows a route primarily on the south facing side of the canyon in order to avoid poison oak patches. Stinging nettle is present along Hummingbird Creek. Finally, you should avoid running into yuccas. An encounter can be quite painful.

Our local yucca (*Yucca whipplei* ssp. *intermedia*) is of special interest. This member of the lily family has dagger-like leaves and produces a five to eight foot tall white flowering stalk in the spring. The premier Chumash Indian village in Simi Valley was located in Tapo Canyon and was named after this plant - "ta'apu" in Ventureño Chumash. The name of the village - Ta'apu - is the origin of the name Tapo.

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

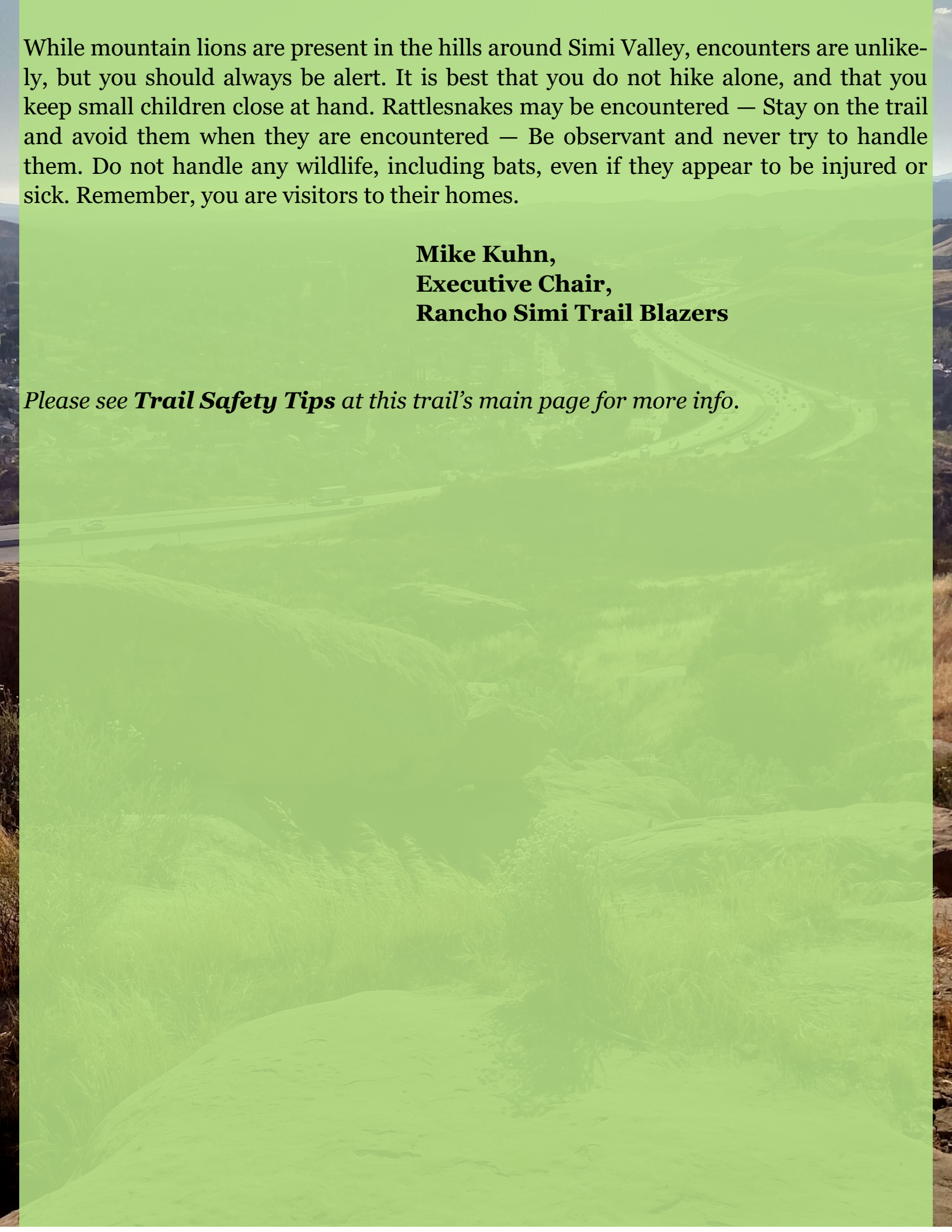
HISTORY AND THINGS TO SEE: Hummingbird Creek and its first tributary north of the freeway is a watery oasis within a dry world. It is one of the few places in Simi Valley where you can visit a natural setting with running water.

Almost half way up the mountain, if you keep your eyes open during the spring and summer, you may observe the red bush monkey flower or a red/yellow bush monkey flower cross. The red bush monkey flower is a variety of the yellow bush monkey flower which has an extra blue gene. The red variety has a very limited geographical range, which is centered on the hills at the eastern end of Simi Valley.

Midway up the mountains you will encounter a deep gorge in the rocks. Above that gorge are caves on both sides of the trail just below a flat. The cave on the right contains interesting formations. Nearby are small California bay laurel trees, with their aromatic leaves. Along the way, as one climbs out of the valley, during the late spring and early summer months, the magnificent Plummer's mariposa lily can be found.

The trail has been established on the south-facing side of the canyon in part in order to avoid the great forests of poison oak on the north-facing slopes.

Flowers are present throughout the year, and there are always enchanting vistas.



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