

Stagecoach Trail (Upper)

THE TRAIL: The Stagecoach Trail is approximately one half mile in length. The trail-head begins on the eastern side of Lilac Lane off of the Old Santa Susana Pass Road and extends northerly over the hill to the Santa Susana Pass Road just east of the Rocky Peak Interchange with the 118 Freeway. While short, it yields a complete exposure of the geology and plants of the area.

The trail was built under the supervision of the Rancho Simi Trail Blazers on land owned jointly by the City of Simi Valley and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. If you would like to find out more about the Trail Blazers or volunteer opportunities, you may call the District's Volunteer Coordinator at (805) 584-4453.

HISTORY: Before there was a stagecoach route over Santa Susana Pass ("kashiwee", meaning "the pass" to the Chumash Indians), there was an Indian Trail. We know from Fernandeano Indian ethnography that the trail ran up the side of the ridge from what is now Chatsworth Park, then along what is now part of Lilac Lane and down the Canyon ("la Ravenna" to the Spanish) into what is now Corriganville Park. A Fernandeano Indian shrine in the area resulted in the name for "Devil's Slide". The Indian trail became the Spanish trail, the first El Camino Real (King's Highway), the Stagecoach Road and then for more than 20 years the only way in and out of Simi Valley to the east. Prior to the establishment of the Coast Stage Route in 1861, it is unlikely that wheeled vehicles ever traversed the pass.

The stagecoach route was used until 1875, at which time it was moved to the Conejo Grade because of the difficulty of getting over the Santa Susana Pass. Local residents and other travelers continued to use the route until the new pass route was finished in 1894. The Stagecoach Trail was constructed in the mid-1990s to parallel Lilac Lane, i.e., the old stagecoach route.

GEOLOGY: The Stagecoach Trail extends through massive sandstone outcroppings that are called the Chatsworth Formation. The formation is of Cretaceous age, locally 68-75 million years old. The formation extends to the end of the Cretaceous Period, at which time much of the animal life on this planet became extinct, including the dinosaurs, due to the impact of a large meteorite where the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico is now located.

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 thick. When exposed to air, the sandstone weathers to a warm tan color. Occasional beds of siltstone and cobbles are present. The formation was deposited in the deep ocean at a depth of 4,000-5,000 feet by turbidity currents, i.e., massive submarine landslides from the continental shelf into deep sea canyons. Those turbidity currents were often a half mile or more in width and tens of miles long. As a result, few fossils survived the grinding action of the long journey into the ocean depths. 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 northwest by 17 degrees. Because of this unfavorable bedding angle, there are many landslides along the Old Santa Susana Pass Road in the area.

PLANT LIFE: The Chaparral Plant Community dominates the Stagecoach Trail. The community is made up of evergreen shrubs with small hard leaves. This fire-climax vegetation is adapted to periodic burning. Chaparral species readily root sprout, thereby out-competing other perennial plants, seeds from which must germinate with rains following fires. Chaparral species grow on thin infertile soils and, when mature, present a solid leaf canopy, which successfully limits soil erosion. Many chaparral species produce seed germinating inhibiting chemicals that preclude other plants from competing for the limited supply of water and nutrients available in any small area.

From mid-summer through late fall mature chaparral is extremely dry and loaded with volatile hydrocarbon compounds. When ignited, especially during the dry northeasterly and easterly Santa Ana winds, devastating wildfires can result.

Perennial plants that may be seen along the trail include: chamise, California mountain mahogany, yerba santa, toyon, laurel sumac, bush monkey flower, hollyleaf cherry, purple nightshade, poison oak, yucca, scrub oak, redberry, deerweed, coast live oak, bush mallow, wild cucumber, black sage, canyon sunflower, slender sunflower, bindweed, California buckwheat, golden yarrow, coast goldenbush, Mexican elderberry and heart-leaved penstemon. Annual plants include red brome, soft chess, golden top, wild oats, small-flowered popcorn flower, narrow-leaved bedstraw, elegant clarkia, black mustard, windmill pinks, skull caps, California filago, canchalagua, wand buckwheat, California poppy, fleabane aster, cudweed aster, annual sunflower, cliff aster, yellow star thistle, and Indian pink among others.

Some plants can be hazardous. Poison oak is present along the northern end of the trail. Avoid touching the plant or letting it brush up against your cloths. Also avoid encounters with yuccas. Their spines are sharp and painful.

The yucca (*Yucca whipplei* ssp. *intermedia*) is of special interest in that the Ventureño Chumash name for the plant was "ta'apu". The Chumash Indian village in Tapo Canyon was named after the plant, and the name of that village comes down to us in the form of Tapo Canyon, Tapo Street, etc.

ANIMAL LIFE: Animals that may be observed from the trail include: birds, such as turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls, California quail, mourning doves, roadrunners, Anna's hummingbirds, common flickers, black phoebes, cliff swallows, scrub jays, common ravens, common crows, mockingbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, California towhees, white-crowned sparrows and English sparrows; reptiles, such as southern Pacific rattlesnakes, San Diego gopher snakes, California king snakes, striped racers, Great Basin fence and California side blotched lizards and San Diego alligator lizards; and mammals, such as various bats, brush rabbits, desert cottontails, California ground squirrels, 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.*