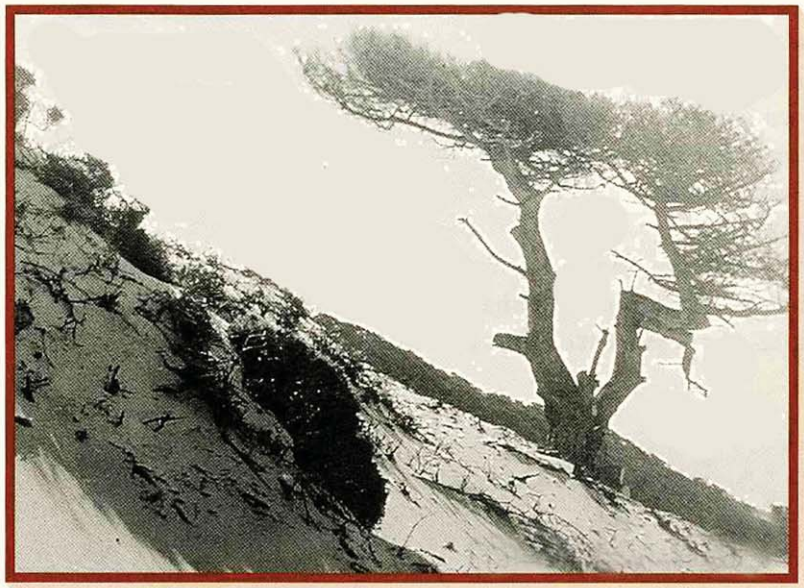
Living Dunes



Dunes - 1918

Discover Asilomar

Self-guided walking tour

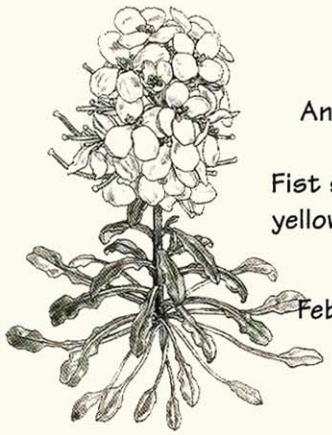
Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds

Wildflowers of the Dunes

Yellow Sand Verbena

Small clustered yellow blooms with succulent leaves.

May - September



Menzies' Wallflower

An endangered species.
Fist size clusters of yellow, four-petaled flowers.

February - April

Yarrow

Fernlike leaves on tall stalks with tiny white blooms.

April - August

Beach Sagewort

Silvery gray with soft hairy leaves. Yellow flowers.

June - August

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Photos #2 & #7 © GraceWorks, Monterey, 1998.
Plant illustrations by Mary Pomeroy.

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Dunes - 1983

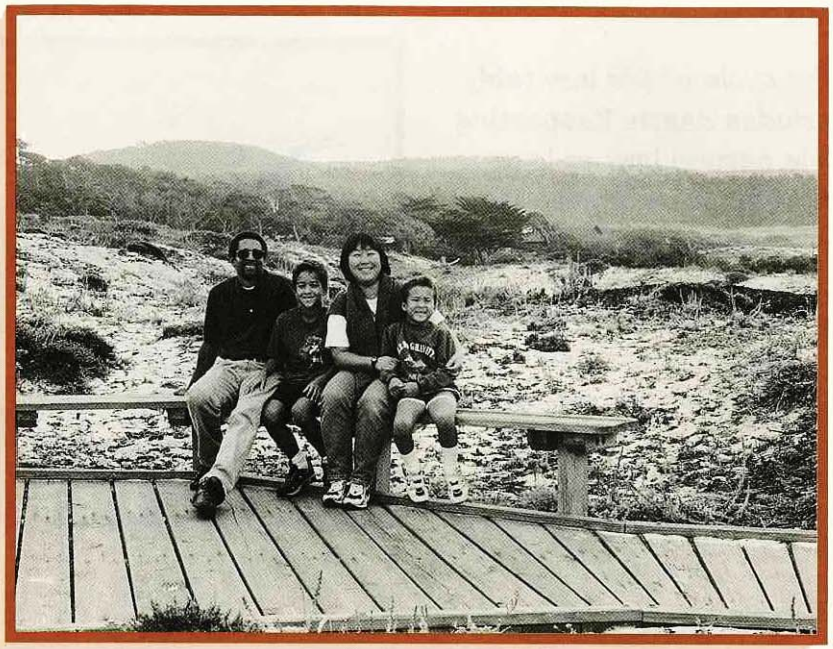
Dunes Across Time

The dunes of Asilomar have a magic all their own. Teeming with plants and wildlife, they are flourishing again... but sadly, this has not always been the case. Used as grazing land for cattle in the 1800s, the original dune system spanned 480 acres. As time passed, development reduced the area to the precious 25 acres that now remain at Asilomar.

In 1912 the land was donated to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) for use as a summer camp and conference retreat. The dunes became an active playground for the young women, with tennis courts, a swimming pool and a softball diamond.

In 1956 Asilomar became a unit of the California State Park System. Park visitors unknowingly continued to trample the native plants and erode the dunes. Exotic plants were brought in to help stabilize the area. Unfortunately, these exotics overran the few remaining native plants and compounded the problem. By the mid-1970s the dunes had become a virtual wasteland of bare sand and exotic ice plant.

California State Parks does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Prior to arrival or before beginning this walk, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park office (831) 646-6440. This brochure is available in alternate formats.



Dunes - Present

A New Cycle is Born

State Park staff began a massive dune restoration project in 1984. First, seeds from the remaining native plants were collected and cultivated, and the invading exotic plants were eliminated. Next, bulldozers resculpted the dunes. Finally, the dunes were revegetated with native plants by hydroseeding and by hand planting.

To provide visitor access and to protect the replanted dunes the first boardwalk was built in 1984, and in 1988 the boardwalk route was extended 1/4-mile.

With the fragile balance restored, the dunes are once again thriving. However, this balance is eternally delicate, needing the respect and protection of all who enter. By staying on the boardwalk, your actions will help protect the future of this dynamic, ever-changing habitat.

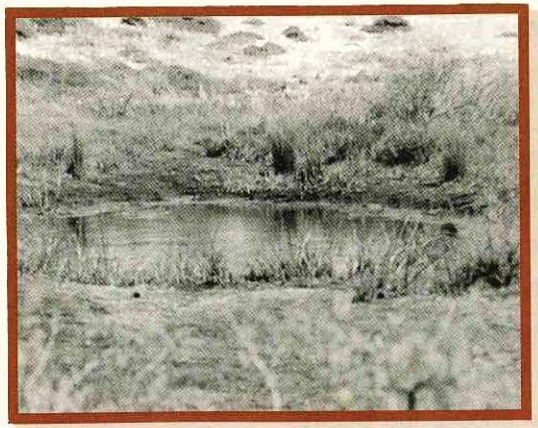
Begin your 1/4-mile tour at the boardwalk entrance near the barbecue area. Allow 30 minutes for the tour. Look for the corresponding numbers along the way. The entire habitat is protected. Please stay on the boardwalk at all times.

one

As you enter the dunes, you sense an immediate shift in the environment. The forest gives way to low lying bushes and grasses. A dune pioneer plant, beach sagewort (see back cover), holds the bare sand in place and creates growing conditions favorable to other plants.

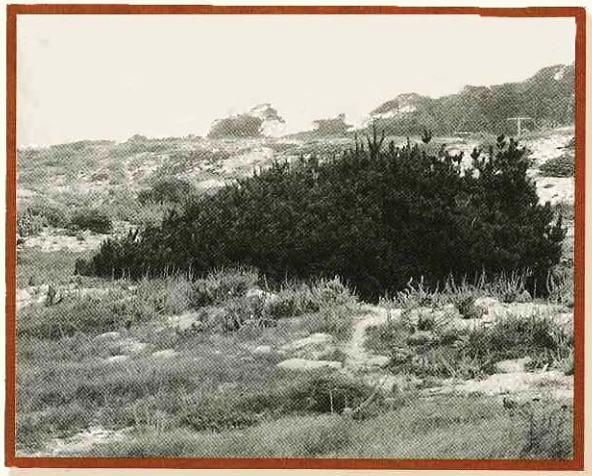
This portion of the boardwalk is constructed of *Trex, a recycled product* made from plastic grocery sacks and wood waste products. Trex is being used to replace worn out wooden planks along the boardwalk.

two



The water table, here, is near the surface. This causes *ephemeral ponds to appear in the swales* after heavy rains, particularly during winter. As the ponds dry up, sedges and grasses take their place.

three



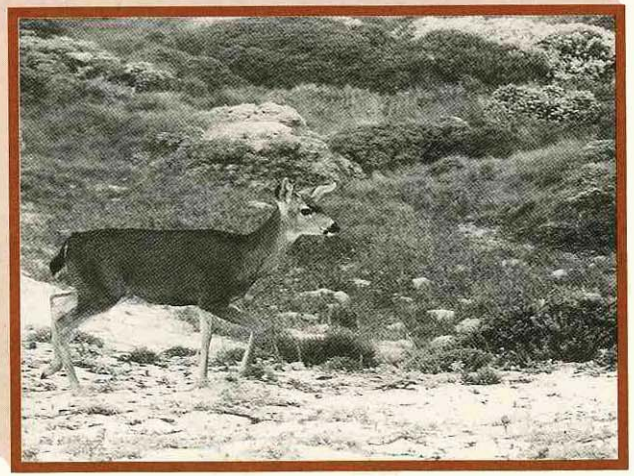
Trees grow only as high as the ridges that protect them from the ocean's damaging salt air. Wind sculpts the trees into dramatic shapes.
The law of the dunes is *stay low, stay alive.* Only low-growing plants can survive the rigors of the dune's ridgetop. Other plants survive on the leeward side of the dune where they are better protected from the wind.

Turn right at the first juncture to continue your tour.

four

The *dune formations* begin as sand is blown up from the beach and trapped by plants. As the plants grow and trap more sand, the dunes build progressively toward the forest, paralleling the path of the prevailing wind. As you move higher in the dunes, you begin to see the pattern emerge.

Along with the plants, the dunes are home to many wildlife species. After sundown, you may see deer grazing. During a spring morning, the calls of white crown sparrows and song sparrows fill the air.



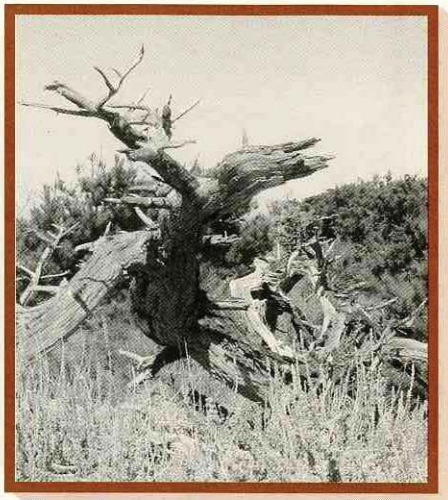
five

Swales are the low-lying area of dunes. This swale is protected by a ridge of dunes around its outer north and south perimeter. Sedges and native grasses form dense mats of vegetation in comparison to the sparse ridge-top plant community. This dense vegetation provides protection and food to the black-tailed deer that are often seen in the area.

To continue this tour to number six follow the boardwalk north and at the junction turn left.

six

The cycle of life inevitably includes death. Respecting this natural law, we leave many animals, plants and trees that have died in the spot they have chosen. This contributes to the ultimate enrichment of the soil, which further nurtures new growth.



seven

The last stop is the native plant nursery. More than 600,000 plants, representing 35 species, have been grown here and then planted in the dunes and coastal bluffs. Survival rates for most species have exceeded 90 percent.

The dune ecosystem is at last re-established. In 2004, the ecosystem was designated a Natural Preserve. Our hope is that through protection, conservation, and education this pristine example of native California flora and fauna will be preserved for generations to come.

If this tour has piqued your interest to learn more about Asilomar's natural environment, we invite you to schedule a walk with one of the park staff by calling (831) 646-6443.