

Explore Goat Rock Trail!

As you walk this self-guided nature trail, witness the beauty of the lush ridgeline and notice how it is the result of the intersection of natural and human impacts over millennia. The plants, animals, and even the rocks tell a story of interconnectedness for those willing to look closely. Take a photo of this sign or scan the QR code to take this guide along as you travel the trail.



7 This former **Douglas Fir** Christmas tree farm is now the site of ongoing forest health projects.

6 **Madrone trees** peeling their bark in summer is thought to be a defense against parasites and diseases.

5 Give that **California Bay** leaf a sniff! Native Ohlone tribes used them for many purposes, such as medicine and bug repellent.

4 Leaves of three, let it be! **Poison oak** produces an oil called urushiol which causes severe allergic reactions in most people. Even the leafless vines in winter can cause these reactions.

8 Descended from pioneer orchards over a century old, our heritage apple and pear trees don't bear fruit, but they still flower in the Spring.

1 As you stroll towards Goat Rock, stop to smell the flowers including **Wild Iris** (left) in spring and **Coyote Mint** (right) in early summer.

2 Take a closer look at this **tafoni cave** filled with "cannonballs," chunks of harder rock that combined with the sandstone as it the cave formed.

3 **Castle Rock State Park** is often called "The Gateway to the Santa Cruz Mountains." The view from **Goat Rock** shows why.

This nature trail and panel were created as part of Nicholas Poplavskyy's Eagle Project, with support from California State Parks, the Portola and Castle Rock Foundation, and REI.



Castle Rock State Park



Welcome to the Castle Rock Interpretive Shelter! We treasure our natural features, but we also understand that one of the things that make this place so special are the human stories, the many ways people have interacted with this landscape over the ages. In that spirit, please enjoy the Interpretive Shelter and Goat Rock Nature Trail!

1. Donated to the park in 1985 by the Sempervirens Fund, this interpretive shelter is the perfect place to picnic and learn more about the park! As you start down the path behind you towards Goat Rock, you'll notice a natural bouquet of plants and wildflowers, including mule's ears and wild iris in the spring, and coyote mint and elegant clarkia in early summer.
2. Have a look at the sandstone rock formation, also known as a "boss," in front of you. You'll probably notice the darker rocks protruding from the boss. These rocks, nicknamed "cannonballs," mixed in with the sandstone early on in the formation process. Because they're made of much harder rock, the cannonballs erode slower than the rest of the boss, causing them to stick out more and more until they fall out.
3. Castle Rock SP is often called "The Gateway to the Santa Cruz Mountains" and the view from Goat Rock shows why. Though strikingly beautiful in the rain and fog, clear days give spectacular views of the rest of the mountains and the verdant San Lorenzo Valley, all the way down to Santa Cruz and even across the bay to Monterey.
4. "Leaves of three, let it be!" As you can see, poison oak doesn't just grow as a stem in the ground, but sometimes like a vine that can cling to rocks and trees. The plant produces an oil called urushiol that most people are allergic to. Touching it can cause an irritating rash, and accidentally eating it or burning it can potentially be fatal.

Look around, you are standing among one of the few black oak forest stands in the Santa Cruz mountains! The indigenous Ohlone tribes prized and protected these trees for the acorn harvests and animal habitats that they provide.

5) Above you grows a California bay tree. Go ahead and sniff a leaf! Many years ago, when the Ohlone peoples lived on this land, they used bay leaves for medicine to treat colds and sore throats. In addition to tea, the Ohlone roasted and grounded the nuts of a bay tree to make a stimulating drink similar to coffee.

6) Madrone trees peel their bark every summer, thought to be a defense against parasites and diseases. Underneath the bark is the phloem— veins in the wood that transport water from the roots to the canopy. Compared to other trees, the madrone's phloem is close to the surface, making the red-orange skin cooler to the touch. In this way, the madrone earns its nickname, the "refrigerator tree."

7) Did you know you're standing in what used to be a Christmas tree farm? Though the popular Doug Fir trees are native to the area, they can reduce the biodiversity of the area by hogging sunlight and water when they grow unmanaged. This causes fuels to build up to dangerous levels, paving the way for large wildfires. The indigenous tribes that first lived in the area knew this, and used techniques like pruning and prescribed burns to prevent excessive growth. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of their descendants, California State Parks are now embracing traditional fire management practices more and more.

8) Enjoy some shade under our historic apple and pear trees! A remnant of centuries-old pioneer orchards, these trees don't produce fruit anymore, but flower yearly between mid-April and mid-May. Note the holes in the trunk- these were created by sapsuckers, a bird species that belongs to the woodpecker family.

Goat Rock Interpretive Trail and guide created by Nicholas Poplavskyy for his Eagle Project in 2021, with assistance from the Portola and Castle Rock Foundation and CA State Parks.