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711, TTY relay service

Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

Located at:
13652 Highway 79
Julian, CA 92036
www.parks.ca.gov/667



Figure – Paso Picacho Picnic and Campgrounds sign

Paso Picacho Nature Trail Map

Distance:
Approximately 0.5 mile



Figure – Paso Picacho
Nature Trail map

Paso Picacho Nature Trail Elevation Profile

Elevation Gain: 23-32 ft
Level: Easy

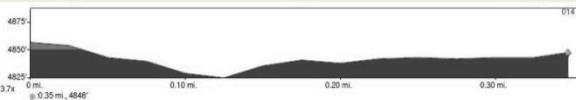


Figure – Paso Picacho Nature Trail elevation profile

Paso Picacho Nature Trail Dog Rules

No dogs
Except Service Animals



Figure – Symbol of a dog with a single red line drawn diagonally across it

Welcome

to the Paso Picacho Nature Trail, where many signs of change await your discovery.

Change is constant in nature. Each numbered stop along this half-mile trail illustrates how change is a basic part of this landscape.

Remains of the previous Nature Trail, such as burnt interpretive signs and post, testify to the dynamic nature of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.



Figure – Trail marker welcome post

Continue along the trail to the first stop.

As you make your way to the first stop, look at the landscape around you and the peaks above you.

Think about how high those peaks are and how they have reached those heights.



Figure – Trail marker post #1

Stop 1 Stonewall Peak

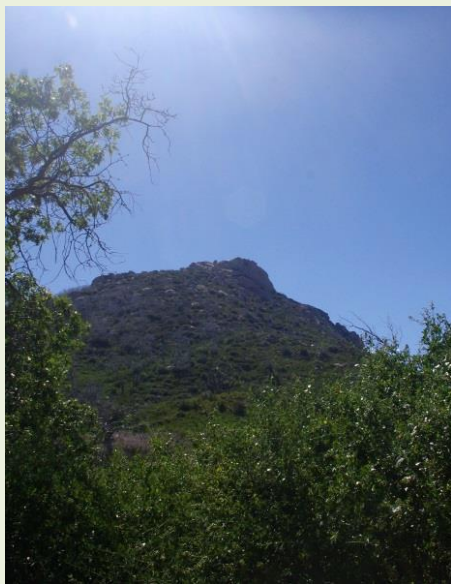


Figure – Stonewall Peak

Stonewall Peak

Reaching 5730 ft (1690 m) above sea level, Stonewall Peak stands as a sentinel beckoning adventurous hikers. A two-mile trail leading to the top view station rewards hikers with an incredible view of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and the Laguna Mountains to the east. The exposed granite rock here suggest a volcanic past.

Stonewall Peak



Figure – Upper Green Valley

Continue along the trail to the second stop.

As you make your way to the second stop, see if you can find how man has influenced the landscape.



Figure – Trail marker post #2

Stop 2

Lake Cuyamaca and Cuyamaca City



Figure – Lake Cuyamaca

Lake Cuyamaca and Cuyamaca City

Looking north you can catch a glimpse of Lake Cuyamaca. Once a seasonal wetland, a dam was constructed in 1888 creating the lake you see today. On the south shore of the lake is the abandoned Stonewall Mine. Cuyamaca City was built to furnish supplies for the gold miners that worked at Stonewall Mine. Today, scenic hiking trails wind through the remnants of yesterday.

Lake Cuyamaca and Cuyamaca City



Figure – The rusting remains of Cuyamaca City

Continue along the trail to the third stop.

As you make your way to the third stop, see if you can find something that show nature's changes through the seasons.



Figure – Trail marker post #3

Stop 3

Black Oak

(*Quercus kelloggii*)



Figure – A Black oak

Black Oak

This deciduous oak tree displays the different seasons that take place here. Not only do the leaves change color and drop to the ground during fall, but the leafy cluster you see represents post-fire growth. Adapting to the devastating changes of the 2003 Cedar Fire, the black oak tree sprouts back to life from its roots. The tasty and robust acorns were once a prized staple of the Kumeyaay peoples' diet. Valued by wildlife, such as acorn woodpeckers, ground squirrels, and deer the black oak continues to play an important role in the park.

Black Oak



Figure – Black oak acorns

Black Oak



Figure – An Acorn Woodpecker, perched atop a branch

Black Oak



Figure – The bark of a tree, dotted with holes and filled with acorns

Continue along the trail to the fourth stop.

As you make your way to the fourth stop, think about who or what may have traveled this trail before you.



Figure – Trail marker post #4

Stop 4

Patterns on the Trail



Figure – An animal track in the dirt, resembling the hoof of a deer

Patterns on the Trail

Take notice of the revealing pattern of animal tracks on the trail. Park residents like deer, bobcats, ground squirrels, insects, and others use this trail in their constant quest for food, water, and shelter. Look down at the different animal tracks on the trail. Where are these tracks leading?

Patterns on the Trail



Figure – A trail camera snapshot of a female Mule deer at night

Continue along the trail to stop five.

As you make your way to stop five, imagine the people who have passed through this area. Who were they? Where were they going? How did they get there?



Figure – Trail marker post #5

Stop 5

Past and Present Travel Routes

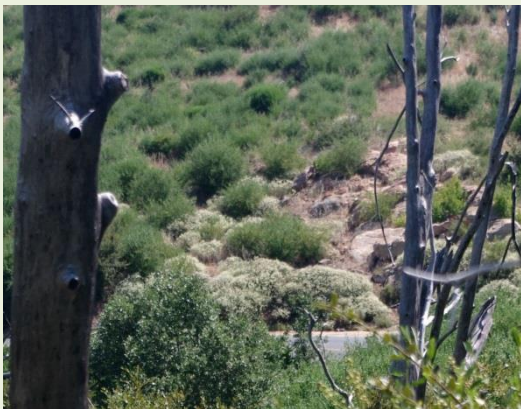


Figure – On a rocky hillside covered with scrub brush, dead snags jut upwards

Past and Present Travel Routes

Before gold was discovered here and miners came to settle, Native Americans lived here establishing a network of foot trails through this “pass of peaks.” The Overland Mail Route from San Antonio to San Diego went right through Paso Picacho, delivering mail to Green Valley south of here. Today this ribbon of asphalt brings visitors to the backcountry of San Diego County and Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.

Past and Present Travel Routes



Figure – Parked among a rocky, brushy landscape is a white sport utility vehicle

Continue along the trail to stop six.

As you make your way to stop six, think about the many ways how the landscape can be changed. Some areas of a landscape may be changed while other areas remain untouched.



Figure – Trail marker post #6

Stop 6

Fire's Path



Figure – A distant hillside, largely scattered with dead snags and sparsely scattered with living trees and brush

Fire's Path

Looking west, one can witness a swath of green vegetation that did not burn in the massive 2003 Cedar Fire. Fire is an important part of the landscape and a catalyst for change. While the patterns of fire can be predictable, its behavior is not. Due to many factors, this inferno changed its course sparing a large patch of trees growing on Cuyamaca Peak.

Fire's Path



Figure – A patch of living trees dot a distant ridge where dead snags largely scatter the surrounding landscape

Continue along the trail to stop seven.

As you make your way to stop seven, see if you can spot a feature of the landscape that affects the weather of the area.



Figure – Trail marker post #7

Stop 7

The Three Peaks



Figure – Cuyamaca Peak

The Three Peaks

Dominating the view, from left to right, are the three peaks that define this region, Cuyamaca Peak at 6512 ft. (1985 m), Middle Peak at 5885 ft. (1794 m), and North Peak at 5993 ft. (1827 m).

These peaks form a barrier from the coast and the moisture-filled air from the Pacific Ocean is forced to spill over the mountains causing the air to condense and drop rain or snow. The name “Cuyamaca,” derived from a Native American word, loosely translates to “rain behind” or “the place where it rains,” with reference to the relatively wet climate of 35 inches of precipitation here.

The Three Peaks



Figure – Cuyamaca Peak

The Three Peaks



Figure – Middle Peak

The Three Peaks



Figure – North Peak

Continue along the trail to stop eight.

As you make your way to stop eight, think about ways in which fire affects plant life.



Figure – Trail marker post #8

Stop 8

Palmer's Ceanothus (*Ceanothus palmeri*)



Figure – Palmer's Ceanothus

Palmer's Ceanothus

Plentiful along this trail, Palmer's ceanothus thrives in post-fire conditions. This white-flowered shrub requires fire to stimulate its seeds for germination. Taking advantage of the open space created by fire, this plant quickly changes the landscape by crowding out less vigorous plants. It also can provide shade for the many plants and trees that may dry up due to overexposure to the sun.

Continue along the trail to stop nine.

As you make your way to stop nine, imagine you are a tree that has been through a fire, what new role might you have in the ecosystem?



Figure – Trail marker post #9

Stop 9

New Life from Dead Trees



Figure – A dead snag juts up from a brushy landscape

New Life from Dead Trees

Look up at the charred pine trunk in front of you. It symbolizes the importance of change in an ecosystem. Once a living tree providing food, shelter, and oxygen, this burnt pine fills a different niche now. Known as a snag, this standing dead tree serves as a perch for many birds to scout out a next meal and provides habitat for small birds, rodents, and insects. Eventually this snag will decompose, slowly breaking down to replenish the soil, allowing other nearby plants to continue growing.

Continue along the trail to stop ten.

As you make your way to stop ten, think about the Cuyamaca Mountains and what may lie beneath.



Figure – Trail marker post #10

Stop 10

Exposed Rock



Figure – A slab of exposed granite sits among a landscape of dead snags and scrub brush

Exposed Rock

This exposed granite rock reveals the remnants of an active earth. The Cuyamaca Mountains are ancient volcanoes that never erupted, with their magma heating and cooling beneath the earth's surface. Fire and erosion of wind and water, have uncovered this evidence of change.

Continue along the trail to stop 11.
Look for the interpretive sign.

As you make your way to stop 11,
see if you can spot something new.



Figure – Trail marker post #11

Stop 11

Talking 'bout Re-generation



Figure – Coast live oak

Talking 'bout Re-generation

In front of you stands a Coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) tree with leaves growing out of its scorched trunk. Coast live oaks have thick bark that insulates sensitive trunk tissue from fire. If this tissue survives it regenerates with leaves sprouting from the trunk. The roots store much of the food necessary to produce new branchlets and foliage.

Talking 'bout Re-generation



Figure – Close up view of Coast live oak canopy

Continue along the trail to stop 12.

As you make your way to stop 12, think about ways people can help nature recover after an event like a fire.



Figure – Trail marker post #12

Stop 12

Looking to the Future



Figure – Jeffrey pine

Looking to the Future

Look toward the tall Jeffrey pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*) tree branches full of green foliage and rounded cones. Before the 2003 Cedar Fire, pines thrived under this moist montane climate. After the fire, many pine trees were not returning as quickly as other plant species. Park staff are now re-establishing patches of the native landscape in the park by planting both pines, firs and cedars. This reforestation project provides significant wildlife, recreation, climate and watershed benefits for Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and beyond.

Looking to the Future



Figure – A sapling pine, growing in a barren landscape of fallen and standing dead snags

Help Protect Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

Your journey around the Paso Picacho Nature Trail has shown you many ways in which nature has changed. From geological forces as a volcanic past, man made influences such as a dam, to fire, the environment has been changed. While some change occurs naturally, it is still important to protect the trees and the ecosystem. The importation of exotic beetles in firewood can harm trees and ecosystems, making them more susceptible to fire such as the devastating 2003 Cedar Fire which destroyed over 2,000 homes and killed 15 people.

Help Protect Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

You can help protect Cuyamaca
Rancho State Park by practicing...



Figure – Buy It Where You Burn It

Thank you for visiting Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

Follow the trail to the park road,
turn left to return to your starting
point.

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Photo Credits

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District Interpretive Specialist
Colorado Desert District

California State Parks

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