



California State Parks

Video Transcript



Gray Whale Area Nature Walk and Limestone Kilns at Wilder Ranch State Park

I'm Bill Perry from Wilder Ranch. I do nature hikes and nature walks. This is Carolyn. She's the chief interpreter at Wilder Ranch. We're standing here on the Chinquapin Trail. This is a trail which goes through Henry Cowell State Park, the Pogonip Park, which is a city park, the UC Santa Cruz university, Gray Whale Ranch, Wilder Ranch, and it ends down on Four Mile Beach on Highway 1. We can start off with our hike.

This is Gray Whale Ranch on the Chinquapin Trail, which transverses completely through Gray Whale and Wilder Ranch, ending up on Four Mile Beach. This ranch was acquired by the State in approximately 1996. It's 2,600 acres of forestland, open land, trails, grassland. To my front is ponderosa pines, similar to the pines you would see up around Lake Tahoe. The Gray Whale Ranch, and Wilder Ranch, is situated on seven different marine terraces. We're now standing on the sixth marine terrace, which was formed here about ten million years ago. We're going to go down the trail; we'll end up at a cross area, from which we can go anywhere we want here on Wilder Ranch. It's like a four-way crossing.

At this point up here in Gray Whale you can make a decision on how far you want to travel, how far you want to walk. This trail to my right is called the Wood Cutters Trail. It's approximately two miles long. The only bad thing about it is—it's a real beautiful trail, it's all wooded, shaded—but you have to turn around and come back the same way. There's no loop. This is the Wood Cutters Trail, and as you know it starts real close to the entrance here to Gray Whale. This trail is two miles long. It is mostly evergreen and redwood forest, second growth redwoods, with mixed laurel trees, madrones, Douglas firs, and it's all in the woods. Only here and there you see the sun, and the only fallback about this trail is that you have to turn around and come back. But it is a full mile trail, over and back, a very nice trail when it's middle of the summer, it's cool, it is the place to come.

Getting back to what I mentioned a while ago about the marine terraces, a marine terrace is formed down at the ocean where the beginning, number one, down there where the bluffs are at, the ocean. What causes them is the tectonic uplift of the earth. The ground is rising one-quarter of an inch in a lifetime; a lifetime is approximately 65 years. Because of the uplifting of the earth with these marine terraces, we also have plant communities.

We're now standing in the chaparral plant community at Gray Whale. Why is it called the chaparral? Because it's very dry. They have bushes such as manzanita, madrone trees, coastal live oak trees, many grasses. These shrubs right here, these are coyote brush—that's

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a native shrub. Back in here is the madrone trees, knob pines, to the right redwoods, Douglas fir, coastal live oak. There's a small madrone tree, another one right here. There's a large madrone tree—that's the size they'll be eventually. Notice how dry it is up here as we continue on. To my left here is this madrone tree, much smaller than that large one we saw back there. This is rattlesnake grass—notice that it looks like rattles. Now there's some more right here, you can get a better look at rattlesnake grass right here. See the rattle.

CAROLYN: It looks just like it. It sounds a little like it.

BILL: Yeah, if you were to pick it and shake it, it would sound like rattles. This area right here, if you're out here hiking, this Gray Whale is a perfect hiking area. Now, when you get to this area, you have to decide which way you want to go. This is a continuation of the Chinquapin Trail. If you go this way you're on the Long Meadow Trail. Eventually they're going to open the trail going out this way, going down towards the limekilns.

I'm standing in front of the limekilns at Gray Whale Ranch. Gray Whale Ranch is also part of the Wilder State Park. This limekiln was built in 1858 and owned by a man by the name of Samuel Adams. This limekiln consists of three different kilns similar to this one, for a total of a complete kiln. The reason that you have three kilns is it's much more effective, more cost-effective. I guess you could make more money. They always made these kilns downhill from the quarry, which is out in back, which we'll film later. This kiln is usually built by a person that knew all about making lime. To make lime, all you need is heat, which is 1,648 degrees, cook it for four days and you've got lime. Santa Cruz County was a very good area for making lime, because of the amount of limestone in the area. Limestone is a stone that was created billions of years ago when this was a sea bottom. This mostly consisted of sea creatures, shells and so forth.

There were a total of 38 people that normally worked at one of these kilns. Out of the 38, five of them were making barrels, which we will look at the foundation of the old buildings up the road here. You had three main people—the one that built the limekiln, an archer, and a blaster. The blaster, of course, he's the one that blasted all of the rock out at the quarry. Then there would be four or five people that would come by with sledgehammers who would break the stone up in small pieces. The archer would arch back each one of these four arches, and he'd make an arch all the way to the rear of the kiln. After he's got all the arches in, they would then start filling in the limestone from the quarry.

Normally the limestone came out of the quarry on wagons, on rails. They would freefall them down and then pull them back up with a winch, load them up and fill the kilns. The way that they were really operating here was there was always one kiln being burnt, one being loaded, one being cooled and cleaned out. It would normally take two days for the thing to cool down sufficiently in order to clean it out, get all the lime out. One of these kilns, after it burnt for four days, burned up anywhere from 70 to 100 cords of redwood, in pieces eight-foot long. Two people known as stokers, their sole job was to stoke wood 24 hours a day into these arches, burning for four days.

From 1858 to 1860, 30,000 barrels of lime was hauled out of this limekiln. There were a total of 114,000 barrels of lime shipped to San Francisco during that same period. The most effective limekilns were this one here at Gray Whale, there's one at Fall Creek, and another

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one at the entrance of UCSC. On the inside of the kiln, it's all lined with fire bricks. These fire bricks were shipped in from Belgium. You can imagine in the 1850s it took quite a few ships to ship a heavy load of firebricks. This one has even got the old Belgian name of the company.

We're looking at the quarry at Gray Whale Ranch, which is on the upper side of the hill of the limekiln. The limekilns were downhill. The blaster would come up here and dynamite this limestone. Then about five other workmen would come up here with sledgehammers and break these stones into pieces about the size of a person's head, load it on the carts, and move it on the tracks down to the limekiln for burning. It looks like they must have really dug a lot of lime out here because it's quite a ways down, down there. This is a good shot of two or three pieces of limestone, and remember what I said at the beginning, if you take this and heat it to 1,648 degrees and heat it for four days, you've got lime.

To my front is the remains of two sheds, one right here in the front and one about a hundred yards out in the middle of those coyote brush. These sheds were used for storing and making barrels in order to ship the lime off. Just to the left of those ruins is the trail that was used for hauling the lime down to the wharf. Normally, when they hauled the lime to the wharf, they would use mules with a double wagon.

Here's some more rattlesnake grass. It's all stomped down where people have walked into it. Oh look at here, honeysuckle, native.

CAROLYN: Oh, looks like the bees like it, too.

BILL: This stuff right here hanging off of these branches is lace lichen. If you were in Louisiana, you'd probably call it moss. Notice the junkus grass, but it's all dying, we're going to see better species.

That's where the water's been draining. Notice that we're seeing more of that madrone, the coastal live oaks, but very small. They're still in this very dry area. There's some more of that lace lichen.

CAROLYN: What's this blooming over here?

BILL: Yes, this is piona. This is manzanita shrubs, mostly found in very dry areas. You'd find this down in the desert, on the edge of deserts. Like I mentioned earlier, this is a chaparral, and this is where you'll find manzanita.

Oh, look here, look at all this poison oak. Notice that it's already changing color. You'd think it's September or October. This is something that when you're out here walking on these trails, you really have to watch for—poison oak. Notice that it's usually easy to identify poison oak—there are always three leaves on the stem. Now this poison oak is already turning red, fall colors. It's kind of early. Most of it is still dark green.

Also in this area notice that right in front of us and to our left are two specimens of coastal live oak. This is better known as an evergreen forest.

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I was talking about the ice age, we'll only go back to the last one 18,000 years ago, and that gives you an idea how all of this was done, for example, how the earth got shaped in this area. In the ice age time, the glaciers were all the way down to about Seattle, Washington, and continued down through Kentucky. The glaciers were two miles thick, so that meant that this area here it rained every day. And we're going to see some of these gullies that are very deep here. Every place you see a creek, you see a gully or you see where the bluffs have been cut, and you'd wonder, "How could these little creeks that only have like two gallons of water in there cut this out?" Well, during that ice age time, the ocean was 480 feet lower and where we're standing would be 200 feet lower. So that means that, all and all, they would be 680 feet lower. So that meant that a lot of rainwater was traveling much faster and that's what cut all these gullies out. And, as you know, out here in the Monterey Bay there's a marine canyon out there that's a mile and a half deep. That was done during all of these different ice ages, when there was plentiful water coming out of the Sierras.

CAROLYN: That wasn't ocean at that time.

BILL: You could probably walk seven miles out. Up at San Francisco Bay there was no water, you could go all the way to the Farallon Islands. But, getting back to this area, you can see that a lot more rain, and a lot lower and hillier, the water was traveling much faster and that's what dug out all these different gulches all over San Cruz County—usually always a gulch name, this gulch, that gulch. There's always a creek there, that's what dug it all out. And, of course, along the bluffs, which are all sandstone, it just cut right through them. Usually these gulches go all the way down to bedrock, granite rock.

CAROLYN: Now, I notice that we're walking on sand here. Now when it wasn't an ice age and this hadn't been uplifted yet, this was ocean floor. Funny to think of this high up in the hills.

BILL: Where we're walking now, probably it's 800 feet above sea level. So this sixth marine terrace was built around ten million years ago. We have a nice breeze coming from the ocean now. Usually in the afternoon the wind starts coming in so it makes it nice. This is called a grassland. This is probably one of the areas where the Indians would burn to get fresh grass every year and to help with hunting. Notice there's a lot of rattlesnake grass here. To our right here, there's one of these closed trails, which is the loop that goes to the Wood Cutters Trail, if it's ever opened, which it should be opened whenever they put in that parking lot.

CAROLYN: Now you were telling me about the second marine terrace, can you tell me more about that?

BILL: Our second marine terrace, that one's probably right there right behind the ranch. That one you can go up on that one, on that trail, and you can actually see a bunch of these rocks that were used during Indian times to make spear heads and arrows. And every time I see that on that terrace overlooking the ocean, I always wonder how it might have looked 1,000 years ago before we got here and made these roads and trails and railroads.

CAROLYN: . . . and cut some of the trees.

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BILL: I can imagine what the guy that was the rock cutter, making arrowheads and spearheads, what he might have been looking at overlooking the ocean.

This is probably where they saw that coyote. I always used to see him going across that meadow.

CAROLYN: Looks like a good place to hunt.

BILL: So, you can imagine in the old days of bow and arrows, you really needed an open area like this for hunting, so you could see the game. There's a nice couple of clumps of coyote brush. If you come out here in the spring, when the coyote brush is blooming, it looks like a coyote's tail. That's why they gave it the name of coyote brush; not bush, but brush. Somebody probably came by and made a joke to someone, "Look at that; it looks like the coyotes were here last night brushing up against that stuff."

A big crop of rattlesnake grass.

CAROLYN: Is that a native grass?

BILL: That's a native grass. All these tall grasses—these ryes, and oats, and barleys—are really non-natives. Those came from Europe. Here in California about 30 percent of all the vegetation is non-native, just like the eucalyptus trees.

This trail right here is where they close every spring for the Ohlone beetle.

CAROLYN: Right, the tiger beetle.

BILL: I guess they like to mate out here on this trail. Notice that they make all the hikers and the bikers go around. There's a trail right over here going along the high grass there.

CAROLYN: The resource ecologist was telling me that they like to mate out in the open, and with all these non-native grasses, they can't find very open places to mate. That's why they're doing some controlled burns to open up more for the beetles. So now the open place they find is the trail.

BILL: So, actually, this is probably why they mowed all the grass over here.

CAROLYN: That's what I am guessing.

BILL: Now over here is another closed area. This is a nice trail. I've walked this trail before it was closed. I hope they open it in the future. And over here they've got a new sign up for this whole hill here, and this is called Mom and Dad's Meadow. Look at the rattlesnake grass here. Now these are some good specimens. And look at the coyote brush.

CAROLYN: Nice view of the ocean here.

BILL: You can start seeing the ocean through the haze. Now, as we keep walking on this trail, when we get back on the trail and we get to the eucalyptus grove, we can really see the ocean.

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This is always a nice area that I like to walk and come up to as we hit these eucalyptus groves. Number one, it's the end of Gray Whale Ranch because the fence is right here. And on the other side, in those groves, that's part of Wilder Ranch. Then, when you get to these groves, there's picnic tables here. Nice place for a picnic, and on a nice clear day when there's no haze, you can see for miles. You can just about see the beaches on the other side of the bay. This is the end of Gray Whale right here; when we cross this fence we're now in Wilder Ranch. The Chinquapin Trail goes to the right, you go down here, and you get on the Baldwin Trail. First you get on the Enchanted Loop Trail then the Baldwin Trail, and that takes you right to Four Mile Beach.

You notice that they just did a burn here lately. This is really good. As I look over this and as many times as I've talked about it, this is similar to what the Indians were doing. We should have nice new grasses next year and be able to see if there's any coyotes running around, be nothing to screen them. Who knows, we might even see some wild pigs.

This must have been an area where the Wilders came for picnics up here at the peak. This Wilder Ranch area right in here is called the eucalyptus grove. From here you can get a view of the Monterey Bay, and back in the haze you can see the San Lucas Mountains, see right over the top of the fog. In the early spring, right along this fence, there's all kinds of wild lilacs, in March and April. We're sitting right here on the eucalyptus grove at the end of Wilder Ranch, which is also the fifth marine terrace that I mentioned at the beginning of the walk. If we look straight ahead down in that brown spot after the tree line, that's probably the third marine level, the second being about a mile from the ocean, and of course the first marine level is the bluffs itself.

CAROLYN: Now when you talk about it being the end of Wilder Ranch, Gray Whale is still part of the State Park, but this was the Wilder family's ranch, so this is their historic home.

BILL: That's right. Now it's all one ranch, all Wilder Ranch. I think we'll go on back to Gray Whale.

Well, this is the end of our hike. I hope you enjoyed it, and I hope you come back. At least make sure you come back during different seasons. I would advise you to come back during the wildflower time. This is very nice wildflower watching here, many different types. So come back and see us.

Running Time: 29:18

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