



GOLD FIELD NOTES

EL DORADO CHAPTER ☼ CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY ☼ JULY-AUGUST 2004

The Traverse Creek Trilogy

By Steve Perry, Senior Serpentine Correspondent

CALENDAR

July 17 (Saturday)

Plant walk.
Van Vleck Meadow, El Dorado County.

July 20 (Tuesday)

Monthly program.
Chapter member Erinie Hartley will give a wildflower show featuring his recent travels.

July 24 (Saturday)

Plant walk.
Don Smith Memorial Hike
Lake Audrian/Osgood Swamp, El Dorado County.

August 7 (Saturday)

Emigrant Lake, Alpine County

REMINDER: There is no monthly program meeting in August.



Monthly programs are held on the third Tuesday of each month with the exception of August and December. Programs begin at 7 PM at the Placerville Public Library, 345 Fair Lane, Placerville.

Check for details on plant walks inside this newsletter.

Last winter, in its infinite wisdom, the chapter field trip committee decided to choose one area to visit three times a few weeks apart in 2004. The place had to be botanically interesting, not too far away, and have a blooming period long enough so that we could see early, middle, and late blooming plants. We chose the Traverse Creek Special Interest Area south of Georgetown. Our intent was to find the early plants like *Lewisia rediviva* and Fawn lilies near the end of April, poppies and monkeyflowers in mid-May, and onions and buckwheats in early June. Well, the weather played some tricks on us, but we ended up having three great trips.

Rich Wade led the first hike to the area on April 24th. Since Rich had come out a few days before and found some interesting plants over on the ridge near the waterfall by the south parking area, we headed in that direction. One of the first plants we found was evening-snow (*Linanthus dichotomus*), a very pretty white flower that lives up to its name. Despite the warm, dry April, there were still some bitterroots (*Lewisia rediviva*) blooming, although they waited until after noon to open up. We also saw golden rock fringe (*Parvisedum pumilum*), a bright little succulent, growing right next to the *Lewisia*. Over by the waterfall, we made our best finds of the day. We were lucky enough to be there on a day when a few Fawn lilies (*Erythronium multiscapoidem*) were in bloom. Out of the hundreds of plants in leaf, only a few bloom each year. As we wandered through the bushes we also came across small baby blue eyes (*Nemophila heterophylla*), a very small bittercress (*Cardamine oligosperma*), and *Trillium angustifolium*, the last two being new finds in the area. After lunch, we went north from the main parking lot and keyed out more plants until we were thoroughly baked in the unseasonably hot weather. But we all had a good time and learned a lot that day.

For the second hike on May 15th we had a special guest - Hugh Safford, the Regional Ecologist for the Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region. Hugh has done extensive surveys of Traverse Creek and generously offered to share his knowledge with us. After we met everyone who came on the trip, we went over to the picnic area and found that Hugh had brought his traveling classroom, including an easel, various geology maps of California and the northern California region, books, and rock samples. For nearly two hours, he talked about geology, 350 million years of the geologic history of the Sierra Nevada, the origin of serpentine and many other rocks, and the effects of ultramafic rocks such as serpentine on soils and vegetation. Using a few technical terms, and many interesting analogies, he managed to clearly explain why California looks like it does and why many of the plants we find in our travels are grouped where they are. For one thing, I always wondered why there were so many interesting Sierra-like flowers up toward Siskiyou County. Now I know - it was part of the northern Sierra Nevada a long, long time ago.

For those wishing to gain more information on geology, soils, and plant life, Hugh recommended several books. One text that relates specifically to serpentine areas is "California Serpentine: Flora, Vegetation, Geology, Soils, and Management Problems" by Arthur R. Kruckeberg (1985, University of California Press). It's a good reference on serpentine soils and endemic plants throughout California, but Hugh warned us that a new edition is in the works, with special emphasis on updating the information in the appendices regarding serpentine endemic plants. Another book by Kruckeberg is the more inclusive "Geology and Plant Life: The Effects of Land Forms and Rock Types on Plants" (cont. p. 2)

For updates between newsletters



Bitterroot (*Lewisia rediviva*)

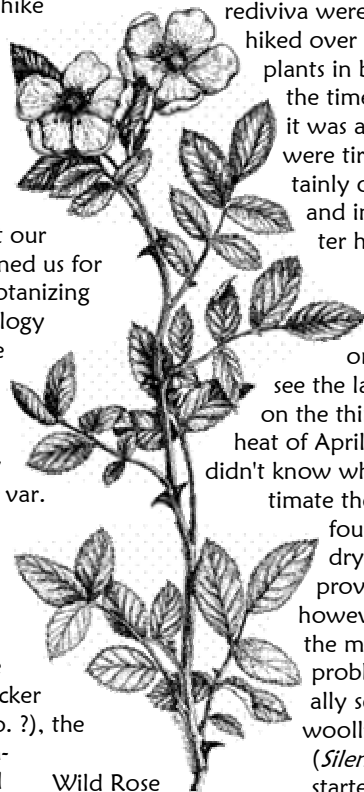
Photo courtesy of Steve Perry

Traverse Creek ...

(Continued from page 1)

(2002, University of Washington Press). To quote from the dust jacket: "Geology and Plant Life is the result of more than forty years of research into the question of why certain plants grow on certain soils and certain terrain structures, and what happens when this relationship is disrupted by human agents." Another valuable book to keep in the car while traveling is "Roadside Geology of Northern and Central California" by David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman (2000, Mountain Press Publishing Company). "Roadside Geology" describes many spots along the highways of the north state (road cuts, scenic views, and other points of interest) where one can find very interesting geological formations. Another book Hugh recommended is "Assembling California" by John McPhee (1994, Farrar Straus Giroux). In addition to a history of how California was geologically created, the book has at least a dozen references to serpentine and serpentine areas. Lastly, I'd like to recommend a book from our personal library: "Geologic Trips, Sierra Nevada" by Ted Konigsmark (2002, GeoPress). This book starts with sections on general geology, geology of the Sierra Nevada, and then has descriptions of dozens of hikes ranging from Lone Pine and Sequoia National Parks in the south to Donner Pass in the northern Sierra. Each hike has a description of the local geology, and some geological features to look for.

Another honored guest on our second trip was Ellen Dean, Director and Curator of the UC Davis Herbarium, and speaker at our chapter meeting in April. She joined us for Hugh's geology talk and went botanizing with us afterward. After our geology class, we headed north along the trail in the direction of the two plots that Hugh had placed there several years ago. Along the way, we keyed out a woolly sunflower (*Eriophyllum lanatum* var. *achillaeoides*) and identified Bridges' brodiaea (*Triteleia bridgesii*), with its remarkable translucent, shiny throat. When we got near the first wooden bridge, the group split into three subgroups – one identified a checker mallow (*Sidalcea malvaeflora* ssp. ?), the second identified the rare serpentine endemic Layne's butterweed (*Senecio layneae*), while the third keyed out a tiny navarretia (*Navarretia divaricata* ssp. *vividior*). When we finally got across the bridge, Hugh took us up to his south-facing plot. We learned why they chose that spot, how they do the surveys, and looked at a number of the plants within the



Wild Rose
(*Rosa californica*)

plot. As the morning clouds finally gave way to a clear blue sky, we went down the hill, across the second wooden bridge, and up the other side of the hill to see the north-facing plot. After that, it was time for some lunch and much needed beverages.

After lunch, Hugh had to go, so we bid him a fond farewell and thanked him for a great lecture and botany outing. A few more folks left, and we were down to four. Since we had some daylight left, we headed for a small seasonal pool we found several months before, in which we found some quillwort (genus *Isoetes*). A couple of us have been searching for *Isoetes* for several years, so this was quite a find. On this day, the pond was almost dry, and the quillwort was in its fertile period. So, we got out the Jepson Manual and keyed it out to *I. orcuttii*. If you ever see one, you'll probably just think it's just another aquatic grass, but we were thrilled to have finally identified it. With the sun heading below the yard-

arm, we still weren't satisfied, so we wandered over toward the waterfall near the south parking area. The *Lewisia rediviva* were gone, of course, but we hiked over the hill and looked at any plants in bloom that we could find. By the time we headed back for the car it was almost supertime, and we were tired, but satisfied. It was certainly one of the most informative and interesting field trips our chapter has ever had.

Shellie Perry led the third and final visit for the year on June 5th. We expected to see the late plants such as wild onions on the third trip, but with the scorching heat of April and lack of rain in May, we didn't know what to expect. Never underestimate the Traverse Creek SIA. We found lots of plants despite the dry conditions. Identifying them proved to be another matter, however. As we headed north from the main parking lot, we had no problems with the plants we usually see there - Bridges' brodiaea, woolly sunflowers, and Indian pink (*Silene californica*). But then we started to falter. There was a larkspur (*Delphinium* sp.) that wouldn't divulge its identity. Then there was a wild rose that wouldn't key out. Was it *Rosa californica* or *R. woodsii* var. *ultramontana*? A large *Monardella* (Mint family) with dozens of bright pink flowers wouldn't key

out at all. One bright spot of the morning's work was that Rich noticed a large valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) that wasn't on the plant list! Well, you can't miss 'em all.

Just before we went back for some lunch, our luck started to turn. The Congdon's onions (*Allium sanbornii* var. *congdonii*) were blooming. And there were a lot of nice flowers along the creek including white brodiaea (*Triteleia hyacinthina*) and the seep monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*). We hadn't quite



Fawn Lily (*Erythronium multiscapoidem*)

Photo courtesy of Steve Perry

made it to the first bridge, but it was noon and we went back to the picnic table to regroup. After lunch everything changed for the better. There were some beautiful superb mariposa lilies (*Calochortus superbus*) near the bridge. We identified several more species that weren't on the list. Canyon liveforever (*Dudleya cymosa* ssp. *cymosa*) and wavyleaf soaproot (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum* var. *pomeridianum*) keyed out to subspecies and variety, respectively. We found a small, pink monkeyflower in the middle of the trail that Ellen Dean had keyed out to *Mimulus layneae* a few weeks before. On the second trip to Traverse Creek, we had reached a different conclusion than Ellen did with a specimen from half a mile away, but after further examination, she was correct. Just to make sure, we later went back to the waterfall, found the same group of plants and keyed them out to *M. layneae*. Game, set, and match!

Speaking for those of us that made all three trips to Traverse Creek, I think it was a great success. Before the first visit, I never would have guessed that we'd add so many new plants to the list this year. Thanks to Hugh Safford and Ellen Dean for allowing us to add their observations to our list. And special thanks to Susan Durham for inviting Hugh Safford, for taking such complete notes of every visit, and for adding them to the plant list each time. We still have more plants out there to discover, and with the help of everyone who went with us this year, we're well on our way.

SUMMER PLANT WALKS

Please contact the trip leaders by the Wednesday prior to the hike to let them know you will be attending.

July 17 (Saturday)

Van Vleck Meadows, El Dorado County

Duration: ¾ day

Meeting Time and Location: Meet at 8:00 am in the Safeway parking lot in Pollock Pines (Sly Park exit off Highway 50).

Description: We will explore the meadow areas around the old Van Vleck Ranch at Tells Creek. Elevations range from 5800' to 6600'. This will tend to be a "park and meander" trip with several stops, rather than a formal hike. We'll go where the floral display is at its best.

Level of Difficulty: Short hike but off-trail in marshy, uneven ground.

Bring: Mosquito repellent and protective clothing is a must!! Also bring, water, lunch, wettable shoes, sun protection.

Contact: Rich Wade (530) 644-7210

July 24 (Saturday)

**Don Smith Memorial Hike
Lake Audrian/Osgood Swamp,
El Dorado County**

Duration: All day.

Meeting time and location: 9:00 am at the Safeway store in Pollock Pines

Description: Our first stop will be at Lake Audrian, a beautiful mountain lake (elevation 7150 feet) near Echo Summit. Among the plants we'll see there are arnicas, larkspurs, wallflowers, gooseberries, lilies, monkeyflowers, violets, saprophytes, and bog orchids. Later we'll drive down Meyers Grade to the Osgood Swamp Botanical Preserve (elevation 6550 feet). Osgood Swamp is home to over 140 species of wildflowers, from the "boggy" plants like sundew and orchids, to meadow plants like camas lily, brodiaea, and lupin, to aquatic species such as the yellow pond lily.

Level of difficulty: Easy. Wear hiking boots. Bring lunch and water.

Contact: Steve Perry at (530) 644-6335 or SEPerry@concentric.net or Amy Hoffman (530) 676-7658 or ahoffman@kieferconsulting.com.

August 7 (Saturday)

Emigrant Lake, Alpine County

Duration: All day.

Meeting Time and Location: 8:00 A.M. at the Pollock Pines Safeway.

Description: We will walk through the forest along Caples Lake, and then switchback up to jewel-like Emigrant Lake, admiring the montane woodland and meadow flowers along the way. Along with asters and alpine lilies we will make the acquaintance of a small but beautiful waterfall. The wet meadow next to the lake is a good place to see *Gentian newberryi*, and the hills around the lake are easily climbable, and full of sub-alpine plants. The scenery is spectacular.

Level of Difficulty: Moderately strenuous. 8.5 miles round-trip, approximately 1,000 feet elevation gain.

Bring: Lunch, water and bug repellent. Wear hiking boots.

Contact: Shellie Perry at 530-644-6335 or SEPerry@concentric.net.

A Nice Quiet Day at Pine Hill

By Steve Perry

A lucky group of thirteen folks made the annual trek up Pine Hill on May 8th in search of wildflowers. We had a much smaller group this year since the other local nature groups were visiting another part of the Pine Hill Preserve. A few people passed on the trip, thinking that because of the warm, dry April most of the plants would have bloomed already. And they were correct to some extent, but it turned out to be a great day for seeing six of the eight rare plants that occur on the Pine Hill unit.

After we carpoled over to the gate leading to the Pine Hill unit, Ray Griffiths graciously gave us a talk on gabbro soils, and why the plants that grow on these soils are unique. He even brought along some rock samples (gabbro, serpentine, granite, etc.) to describe the minerals in the soil and help us understand the chemical challenges faced by the plants on the upper part of the hill.

As we started up the hill, we did find that some of the common foothill plants, such as Chinese houses (*Collinsia heterophylla*) had bloomed already. As we left the oak woodland at the bottom of the hill and entered the gabbro soils above, we started encountering

the rare plants of Pine Hill. The first one we encountered was Layne's butterweed (*Senecio layneae*). We actually saw quite a few of them blooming that day. Around the corner and up the hill a short distance, we saw several Pine Hill flannelbushes

(*Fremontodendron californicum*) in bloom. Just past the house that was built a few years ago we found the El Dorado bedstraw (*Galium californicum* ssp. *sierrae*) and it was blooming too. It's hard to find because it's so small, but we were there just at the right time this year. Along the last half mile or so we began to see the bright green cauline leaves of the El Dorado mule-ears (*Wyethia reticulata*). Even though the mule-ears weren't blooming yet, they seem to be multiplying every year. We found the other two rare plants at the top of the hill. The Pine Hill ceanothus (*Ceanothus roderickii*) can be found right along the road near the top of the hill, and the Red Hills soaproot (*Chlorogalum grandiflorum*) grows right in the middle of the road that runs around the lookout. Many of them had flower stalks with

blossoms, but they bloom in the evening, so we could only admire the unopened flowers.

We also saw many of the common and not so common plants that we've come to know. We saw several of the natural hybrid *Calochortus al-*



El Dorado Mule Ears
(*Wyethia reticulata*)

bus/monophyllus. It has the tall stalk and nodding head of the *C. albus* (fairy lantern), but yellow petals from the *C. monophyllus* (yellow star-tulip). The chamise bushes (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) were in full bloom, with thousands of tiny white flowers. The blue irises (*Iris macrosiphon*) and buckeye trees (*Aesculus californica*) were also blooming

in abundance. Last, but not least, we added pretty face (*Triteleia ixioides*) to the plant list (even

though it was behind a barbed wire fence and we couldn't key it out to subspecies).

It turned out to be a great day for wildflowers, and it just goes to show that there are surprises to be found out there in the field if you just look hard enough.

Photo courtesy of Marc Landgraf



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**DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF
 CALIFORNIA'S NATIVE FLORA**

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide nonprofit organization of amateurs and professionals with a common interest in California's native plants. The mission of the Society is to increase understanding and appreciation of California's native plants and to preserve them in their natural habitat through scientific activities, education, and conservation. Membership is open to all.

Membership includes the quarterly journal, *Fremontia*, the quarterly *Bulletin* which gives statewide news and announcements of Society activities and conservation issues, and the chapter newsletter *Gold Field Notes*. To join, call our main office in Sacramento, (916) 447-2677.

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