

Van Damme State Park: Fern Canyon Trail Guide

Hello Hiker,

You are standing on traditional Pomo land where Pomo people have thrived for thousands of years. This guide will take you on a little adventure to meet redwood, fern, and salmon, a few plants and animals tribal people still utilize. To get acquainted with these and others, look for trail markers with steel tiles that match this paper guide's images. As you read the accompanying text, imagine you become a part of this web of plants and animals, including humans. Touch each tile and run your fingers around the shapes. Then, take a look around. Can you spot some of these plants and animals along this creek? We hope that you feel better connected to the natural world when you end your hike. With everyone's care, it will flourish for the next thousand years.



1 Red Alder: After streamside forests are burned or logged, *Alnus rubra* moves in and begins the healing process. Alder grows quickly, covering the bare ground. Their roots turn nitrogen from the air into the fertilizer other plants need to thrive.



2 Western Sword Fern: You can find *Polystichum munitum* along the bank of the creek and up the slope. The leaflets along the stem look like a line of tiny swords. Millions of years ago, ferns were the largest plants on earth. Over eons, layers upon layers of fern built up and were geologically compressed into coal.



3 Redwood Cone: From the mighty redwood tree, *Sequoia sempervirens*, Pomo created stools and boxes, paddles, dugout canoes, and fishing tools. Redwood bark was even used to make women's skirts and men's mantles for ceremonial purposes. Today, Pomo use redwood bark and root fibers in basket-making.



4 Coho Salmon Ocean Form: This is the sleek head of an ocean-going coho salmon, *Oncorhynchus kisutch*. During its three years at sea, a coho's torpedo-shaped body slices through the water after prey. To smaller fish below, its light-colored belly looks like an innocent splash of sunlight. Seen from above, its silver-blue speckled back camouflages against the shadowy depths, protecting it from its own predators.



5 Dragonfly: A dragonfly lays its eggs in fresh water. Each egg hatches out an aquatic insect called a nymph. The nymph stalks the depths for prey, growing larger. Eventually, it crawls out of the water, splits open its outer covering, and emerges as the dragonfly we see hunting on the wing.

The Fern Canyon Self-Guided Nature Trail begins at the yellow gate in Van Damme State Park. The guided portion of the trail is approximately one mile (1.6 km) long.

California State parks and MendoParks support equal access. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting MendoParks, 707-937-4700. 711, TTY Relay Service.

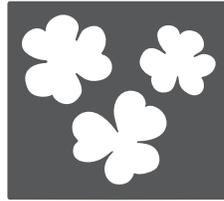
No Dogs allowed on trail.



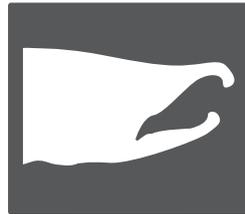
6 Poison Oak: Deer, squirrels, and birds feed on poison oak berries. But toxic oils from leaves and stems can give you itchy rashes that last for days. Remember: “Leaves of three, let it be!” *Toxicodendron diversilobum* can hide as a small plant among other plants, grow into a large shrub, or climb as a vine to the top of the tallest tree.



7 Pacific Wren or Winter Wren: This tiny brown bird is difficult to spot. Its scientific name, *Troglodytes pacifica*, means pacific cave dweller, or “a western bird that lives in dark places.” Though barely bigger than a hummingbird, the wren boasts tremendous lungpower. In late winter or spring, it belts out a trilling, staccato song. If you don’t hear it, look up “pacific wren song” on the Internet and enjoy.



8 Redwood Sorrel: *Oxalis oregana* grows beneath redwood trees. If you turn around and look up the slope, you’ll see it. In spring and summer, redwood sorrel looks like a carpet of clover leaves dotted with pink or white flowers. If the underside of the leaf is dark purple, you’ve found it!



9 Coho Salmon Spawning Form: At the end of its life, a coho salmon, returns to the stream of its birth. As the time nears to lay and fertilize its eggs, the silvery-sleek body changes. The flanks turn red, the belly darkens, the head turns green, and the jaw and teeth become hooked and twisted. Land animals and birds feed on the carcasses of “spawned out” salmon, carrying rich ocean nutrients throughout the forest.



10 Alevin and Eggs: In spring, a salmon egg hatches in the gravel at the bottom of the stream. A strange creature known as an alevin emerges, still attached to the egg yolk that feeds it. It hides in the gravel until its yolk is all gone. Then, the young salmon swims to the surface, gulps air to fill its air sac, and begins life as a fish.