

# California Native Plant Society



*Sacramento Valley Chapter  
Stockton Sub-chapter*

*June 2005  
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Wildflowers promise to continue continuing rains over the state. This year so far. Every trip, no matter how new sights or sights rarely seen. The enough time to visit all the wondrous ence in the bounty through the memories of others, captured either in prose or pictures. Good hunting and please share so that we all benefit even if we weren't along for the ride. *ed*

well into the summer with the con- has truly been an wildly productive near or distant brings back reports of sad thing is that there will never be locations. Hopefully we can epxeri-

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## *Arena Plains*

*by David Marraccini*

We left the Stockton area for the Arena Plains in the Great Valley Grasslands State Park near Merced. The Great Valley Grasslands State Park contains one of the last remnants of the valley grasslands that once covered large areas of the Central Valley. Much of the great Central Valley was once forested with valley oaks and other riparian vegetation near the rivers. As you moved away from the rivers, the oak savannahs gave way to grasslands and these grasslands once contained wildflowers that bloomed in the spring. The Arena Plains contain some of the last vernal pools in the Central Valley.

One car contained Grover, Barbara Bowers, and me. In the other car was Martha, Bob, and Harriet. On the way to the Arena Plains from the town of ?????, Grover's car got lost. It was not fault of Grover's but rather improper posting of signs and ranger miscommunication. As we bounced along the country road we realized we were lost, but Grover, being the optimist that he is, said "You're never lost as long as you have a full tank of gas." We finally found a friendly farmer who pointed us in the right direction and we made our way to the plains.

We saw goldfields & tidy tips growing near the pools. the docent talked about how grazing doesn't hurt the grassland as long as it is not overgrazed. it gets rid of the non-native grasses and allows the flowers to bloom.

But the highlight of the trip was finding the desert primrose growing out on the sand dune. This white flower was blooming and was wonderfly fragrant.

## **Delta EcoTour - EVENTS -**

Date: June 21, 2005

Cost: \$25/person.

Celebrate the Solstice aboard the SS Tule Queen as Dr. Jeff Hart navigates the Delta waterways while discussing the history, the ecology and the botanical wonders of the area.

The Tule Queen is scheduled to depart at 6:30 from Hart Restoration (Nursery?) near Walnut Grove and will return at sunset.

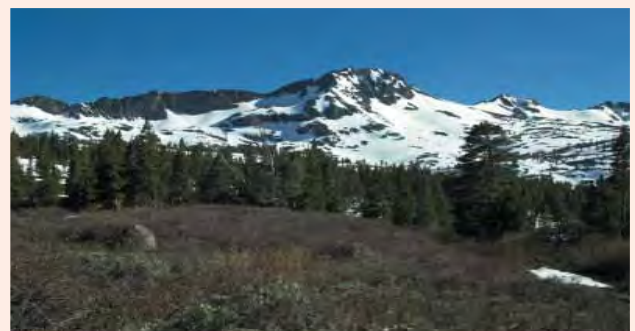
Cost: \$25 per person for the Midsummer Eve's Eco-Tour.

Includes: Sandwiches & Sparkling Cider

Space is limited. Please phone Martha Mallery at (209) 477-3966 for reservations.

## **CARSON PASS**

Botanist and University Of the Pacific Instructor, Dr. Mark Brunell will lead a Carson Pass hike in the second half of July. More details will be forthcoming as we get more information from ENFIA (El Dorado Nat'l Forest Interpretive Assn.) members on conditions at Carson Pass. For latest information or to sign up please call Bob Stahmer at (209) 943-2277.



## Spicebush - *Calycanthus occidentalis*

by David Marraccini

Spicebush is a shrub or small tree that grows in moist canyons and also along rivers and streams. This makes spicebush an excellent plant for those who want a shade garden or riparian garden using California native plants. Spicebush grows well with western sword fern, redwood sorrel & ginger. Ginger, redwood sorrel and sword fern form the lush green groundcover in the garden while spicebush is more of a shrub or small tree.

Spicebush can grow from 3.5 to 10 feet tall. It is a multi-trunked shrub or small tree. It is often as wide as it is tall. Micke Grove has some very fine specimens of spicebush growing along the Sunshine Trail in their native plant garden. The green leaves 1.25 - 6" long and about ½ as wide are ovate or oblong shaped. When the leaves are crushed they give off a sweet spicy aroma that some have likened to nutmeg or allspice. I think it's sweet spicy odor is combined with a hint of camphor.

The flowers are reddish-brown to maroon in color. The seed pods that follow are urn shaped and during the winter the Yosemite lady bugs overwinter inside the pods. The native Californians made a tea from the bark of the spicebush to treat cold & flu symptoms and to relieve stomach aches. They used the straighter wood for arrow shafts.

Spicebush is found in the inner and outer coast range mountains from Sonoma & Napa counties south to Kern Co. It is also found in the foothills of the SN below 5000.'

I have some plants growing in my yard. They require summer watering as they aren't as drought tolerant as the majority of California native plants but they grow fairly fast and are a nice specimen plant. They will grow in sandy loam or clay soils.

According to Maryruth Casebeer who wrote a wonderful book called: "Discover California Shrubs" (2004), the spicebush is a relative of the spicebush that grows in the Eastern United States. Like the eastern species, the California species loses its leaves in the winter, but they grow back in the summer.

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Photo by Bob Stahmer of *Allium crispum* ("crinkled onion") from fieldtrip with Dr. Brunell and UOP Cal Flora class to New Idrias Mine, 4/2/05.

## MERCED RIVER CANYON - HITE'S COVE TRAIL

by Grover Bethards

On Friday, April 2, Martha, David & I departed from David's home on a beautiful day and headed to the Merced River canyon looking for wildflowers. We passed field after field of flowers on our way to the canyon. As we approached the Merced River canyon, however, we found it picturesque but I didn't see many flowers, and I was initially a little disappointed. After all, this was my first trip to this area. I was surprised to see so many people there. We were able to find a nice parking spot close to the Hite's Cove trailhead. We joined many people there but as we walked along the long (about 3 miles) narrow trail we slowly spread out. There were masses of flowers both above and below the trail. There were dozens of varieties of colorful flowers and plants that ran the gamut of colors of the rainbow... red paintbrush, orange monkeyflowers, yellow poppies, green ferns, blue lupine, and purple Chinese houses! We saw small inconspicuous "belly flowers" to large boldy-colored flowers such as the magenta owl's clover blanketing the hillside. The trail was very steep and very narrow in spots. I found all of the people along the trail to be pleasant and friendly. I visited with many of them. There were teachers, others (like myself) just enjoy flowers and still others were biologists and botanists. I really enjoyed my first trip to this wildflower wonderland and look forward to a return visit. I would recommend this trip to anyone who enjoys flowers and scenery. There were so many flowers of so many shapes, sizes and colors to satisfy all.

(editor's note: Unless the schedule has changed in the last couple of years, this trail closes at the onset of Fire Season.)



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## The World's Most Beautiful Native Plant Nursery...

by Bob Stahmer

OK, maybe this is the first and only native plant nursery I've ever visited, but I am still in awe of the setting and the huge selection of plants I witnessed. The nursery is the Yerba Buena Nursery in the Woodside hills. My understanding is that this Bay Area nursery is the oldest native plant nursery in California. After driving up along the crest of the hills with views of the bay and ocean on either side, I came to the entrance sign opposite the Thomas Fogerty winery on the other side of the road. It was an interesting 2-mile drive down a dirt road into the heart of the forest (nice wildflowers occurring naturally on the road banks). Entering the gate you come to an antique barn and buckboard. If you look beyond the old barn to the left you'll see a beautiful expansive chateau under construction. Then you come to the gardens and creek parking area. There are old sheds, a little gift shop and hundreds of potted plants as you wander down the paths. On one hillside is a demo garden. If you are in the area, this place is great, take a look! They put out an informative color newsletter too. (call for hours - closed Mondays)  
[www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com) tel. (650) 851-1668

# Calaveras Big Trees State Park

## Lava Bluffs Trail

by Bob Stahmer

Don't ask why, but I seem to be addicted to the Lava Bluffs trail at Calaveras Big Trees State Park this year. Maybe it's the fact that each of the 6 times I've visited this season, it has changed or I discover something I've never seen before or someone asks me to take them there for the first time. There's also the somewhat daunting self-inflicted challenge of learning the flora of this trail, waiting and watching for the different stages of the plants to aid in their ID. Add to that the challenge of taking pictures the many species of the flowering plants in the park and donate them to the park. Hopefully this might help others as they hike the trail and wonder about the plants they encounter (without investing in Jepson and a dissecting scope). Maybe I'll even discover an effective retail product to keep the hungry hordes of mosquitoes at bay!

The first time I hiked the trail this year, a few of us had gone up for a "Birds of the Park" lecture and walk. Inclement weather cancelled the bird walk but not my personal Lava Bluffs walk. I wanted to get an idea of the earliest flowering species, such as Brown Bells (*Fritillaria micrantha*), to start my study. There was just the last evidence of snow pushed up against the bank of the perimeter road. I hiked the trail in a light constant rain. This I figured would be good exercise and I wouldn't melt, but the camera might be the

worse for wear. I kept blotting it dry as I tried to photograph on that wet gray day.

As I've made more trips, those withering flowers of one species are just replaced by new ones in a beautiful progression of colors and forms. I have to thank Dr. Mark Brunell from the University of the Pacific, and his patient family, for agreeing to accompany me on one of the early trips to help ID whatever we came across that day. Indeed, a few plants he keyed were not species on the park list that I obtained a few years ago from the Visitor Center personnel (I believe it was just two people, Mr. & Mrs. Hickling, that did most of the species ID work for the park and created the bulk of the plant list). I transcribed the old list into a sortable spreadsheet and added the newly identified species. I would definitely appreciate knowing about any more current list of the park flora that might be available. Also anyone desiring a copy of this spreadsheet is welcome to have a copy ("at your own risk!").

The last trips have been exciting for the fact that I'm seeing some parasitic/saprophytic plants for the first time in my life. For example, 2 weeks ago I ran into what looked like the top of a white pine cone emerging from the mat of pine needles. It appears to have been Fringed Pinesap (*Pleurocospora fimbriolata*) in flower.

Well, gotta run back to the Lava Bluffs trail this Saturday (6/18) to keep an eye on things. Come along if you're free! Here's wishing you similar personally-rewarding discoveries no matter how large or small!

