Red hills & bleached bones

[Editor’s note: Last month’s newsletter began with excerpts from a Georgia O’Keeffe piece dealing with flowers. Here is the second half of the same piece. O’Keeffe’s red hills were in New Mexico. Her words remind me of our own Red Hills, which are enchanting even in winter, when the flowers are few and far between.]

“Then when I paint a red hill, because a red hill has no particular association for you like the flower has, you say it is too bad that I don't always paint flowers. A flower touches almost everyone's heart. A red hill doesn’t touch everyone’s heart as it touches mine and I suppose there is no reason why it should. The red hill is a piece of the bad lands where even the grass is gone. Bad lands roll away outside my door - hill after hill – red hills of apparently the same sort of earth that you mix with oil to make paint. All the earth colors of the painter's palette are out there in the many miles of bad lands. The light naples yellow through the ochres - orange and red and purple earth - even the soft earth greens. You have no associations with those hills - our waste land - I think our most beautiful country - You may not have seen it, so you want me always to paint flowers.

“I fancy this all hasn't much to do with painting.

“I have wanted to paint the desert and I haven't known how. I always think that I can not stay with it long enough. So I brought home the bleached bones as my symbols of the desert. To me they are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around - hair, eyes and all with their tails switching. The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable - and knows no kindness with all its beauty.”

Red Hills with Flowers, 1937 by Georgia O’Keeffe

Ram’s Head, Blue Morning Glory, 1938 by Georgia O’Keeffe
2021 Field Trip Update

David Campbell

Field Trip Coordinator and Mariposa County Vice President

Spring wildflowers have come to the foothills, and we hope you’ve had the opportunity to get out and enjoy them. If not, get out right now! We have decided to continue to postpone field trips for our chapter for the time being. At this time, the positivity rate of coronavirus has dropped from the dramatic spikes in December and January, but remain around the same level as the peak from last summer. New, more contagious variants are circulating. Local hospital ICU capacity remains low. Most of us do not have access to vaccines. All the while, many people are relaxing their guard, or never have followed CDC and state guidance to reduce virus transmission.

Instead of organizing field trips, we strongly encourage our members to get out and enjoy the blooms on their own or in small groups, following guidelines to reduce the potential of virus transmission. To that end, we are providing a list of 70 field trips that our chapter has organized over the last 16 years as a separate PDF file. Please get outside, botanize, and stay healthy. Enjoy one of these wonderful locations or find your own. Then, report back to us.

Please write up a short trip report and send us your photos to be included in future newsletters. As you get out and about, think about if you’d like to lead a field trip at one of the listed locations, or add a new location for 2022. If you feel inspired, email me so that I can get you on the docket for 2022.

As the situation evolves we may announce some field trips the month ahead in the newsletter. If you think you’d like to lead a field trip later this year, and invite the rest of our members, please let Doug and me know and we will announce it in the newsletter.

Poppies along the South Fork of the Merced on Hite Cove Trail, March 7th, 2021.
Early Calaveras County Wildflowers
See next page for key
Photos © Karen Orso
Key to Calaveras County Wildflowers
by Karen Orso

CW from upper left:

*Primula clevelandii var. patula* in bloom in western Calaveras County along the Mokelumne Coast-to-Crest Trail on EBMUD property in the vicinity of the Campo Seco Staging Area. (Photo taken on February 22.)

*Enemion occidentale* - A small population located in western Calaveras County on EBMUD property right along the Mokelumne Coast-to-Crest Trail in the vicinity of Gunsight Rock. The species is rather common and can be found in bloom much later in the season in shady canyons at higher elevations. These particular False Rue Anemone plants are able to survive at a relatively low elevation on a windy, cool, north-facing slope above the Mokelumne River. (Photo taken on Mar. 1.)

*Pedicularis densiflora* blooming along the Mokelumne Coast-to-Crest Trail in western Calaveras County on BLM land. The Warrior Plume plants found outside and to the east of the Coast Ranges such as these may be a separate species, *Pedicularis aurantiacus*. (Photo taken on February 18.)

*Ranunculus hystriculus* blooming in western Calaveras County in Spanish Gulch on EBMUD property along the Mokelumne Coast-to-Crest Trail. (Photo taken on February 22.)

*Viola sheltonii* blooming in northern Calaveras County at 3,000’ elevation at the top of the canyon of the Middle Fork of the Mokelumne River. This species sometimes exhibits cleistogamous flowers that remain closed in bud form and self-fertilize. (Photo taken on February 28.)

If you would like to explore the Mokelumne Coast-to-Crest Trail on your own, here is a link to trail maps and other relevant information: https://www.ebmud.com/files/3015/9354/4657/Mokelumne_Watershed_Trail_Map_for_web.pdf

NOTE: The trail system resides on EBMUD property. You need to purchase an inexpensive annual or day use permit to legally walk the trails.
February Hite Cove Wildflowers –
presented in the form of a puzzle, for children and adults
Prepared by Doug Krajnovich

1. I feel sad when people mistake me for the California State Flower.

2. I am the first (or second) wildflower to appear each year. I even beat the Filarees. Use my leaves to confirm ID.

3. You will find me on sunny days from late February into March. I fold up on cloudy days.

4. I am abundant and widespread, but people tend to miss my tiny flowers with adorable purple anthers. I am better known by my fruit.

5. I am a common member of the Carrot family – the first of my family to appear at Hite Cove.

6. I am the only non-native wildflower in this puzzle. Please don’t hold it against me.

7. The botanists changed my name recently, but I am still the same old loveable flower.

8. You will only find me in dripping wet places.

9. I am just getting started. Come back in a couple of weeks and I’ll play my violin for you.
February Hite Cove Wildflowers (cont’d.)

10. I am not widespread, but there is a shady, damp, rocky spot where I thrive every year.

11. I confess, I’m a tree. But I bloom early and have pretty flowers – don’t you agree?

12. Since my flowers are only a few mm across, I am easy to miss, but I am quite common. Once you get to know me, you will spot me in many different places, including Yosemite.

13. I am the only member of my genus that occurs at Hite Cove. The flowers of my sister species look much the same, but our leaves will help you tell us apart.

Hite Cove can be accessed from Redbud Lodge or Cedar Lodge on Hwy. 140. Most people use the trail marked in red, which runs parallel to the South Fork of the Merced River. This is an out-and-back walk. The distance from the trailhead to the old mining settlement is roughly 4 miles one-way / 8 mi. round-trip, but you can turn around whenever you like. The red trail is “front-end loaded,” with many species represented in the first ¾ mile.

A longer (and tougher) option is to leave a shuttle car at the Redbud, start at Cedar Lodge, walk up and over Pinoche Ridge (orange and yellow), then exit via the south fork (red). If you haven’t been to Hite Cove, familiarize yourself with the red trail first. It is in excellent condition. The yellow trail still has one sketchy section due to damage from the 2018 Ferguson Fire.

All of the flowers in this puzzle were seen on the red trail on February 20. All except #2 should persist until the end of March or later. An answer key will accompany the April Newsletter.
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