

MOUNT DIABLO REVIEW

MOUNT DIABLO INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION

FALL / WINTER 2020 • MDIA, PO Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346 • 925-927-7222 • www.mdia.org

Signs of Success

Park Volunteers “Hike Them All” to Ensure You Have a Peak Experience

Whether you’re touring Rock City with your kids or trekking to the summit with a friend, every hike on Mount Diablo shares something in common beyond the park’s natural beauty: clearly marked trail signs to help guide you on your way.

“As a longtime hike leader, I want people to have a good experience,” says Steve Smith, president of the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA). “It’s a big park, with 20,000 acres, so it’s easy to get turned around.”

Steve wants to ensure that doesn’t happen. In partnership with Mount Diablo State Park, he and a team of state park volunteers spent the last year crisscrossing all 162 miles of the park’s trails to document and replace weatherworn, vandalized, or missing signs—all while practicing responsible social distancing. So far, the team has photographed and catalogued all 870 signs attached to the park’s 407 guideposts and has replaced 150 of them. In the process, a few volunteers also completed Mount Diablo State Park’s “Hike Them All” trail challenge.

“It was the silver lining of the shelter-in-place,” says Steve, adding that during the shutdown new solar panels and motion-sensor lights were installed at Juniper Campground and Macedo Ranch. “Several of us had time on our hands and the desire to accomplish something meaningful.”

Some of the distinctive glossy-brown aluminum trail signs, paid for by MDIA, now also include an additional detail:

peak elevation. For weekend warriors clocking their climbs, the added reference provides not only an official marker of their endurance but also an Instagram-worthy photo of their finale. Additionally, older signs in remote areas of the park that bear only directional arrows will be updated to include trail names and destination points. For Steve, this became more pressing as he completed the “Hike Them All” challenge in 2016.

“My hope is that others embarking on this hiking challenge will spend more time enjoying the unique natural history of the park instead of fretting over which turn to take at the trail junction.”

The trail sign project, initiated by former MDIA president Mike Woodring in 2017, has been both an ambitious undertaking and a deeply rewarding endeavor. Just ask state park volunteers Scott and Terri Denslow.



MDIA President Stephen Smith with a newly installed trail sign.

“In 2019, Terri and I did the one-day training for the Volunteer in the Parks Program (VIPP) and fell in love with it,” says Scott. The Clayton couple were soon out roving trails as park ambassadors and helping with trail maintenance projects. While out in the field, Scott met Dan Fitzgerald, MDIA board member and co-lead of the state park’s 20-year-old Trash Removal Project (TRP) team. This hardy group of volunteers ensures that, among other things, park trails remain clear, trash is picked up, fire breaks are maintained, and fences mended. Dan, who was

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PARK SUPERVISING RANGER'S REPORT Cameron Morrison



THE UNPREDICTABILITY THAT we are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in our family lives, social lives, financial lives, and work situations is unprecedented. California State Parks recognizes the physical and mental health benefits of spending time in the outdoors, which is why we're doing all we can to

ensure you have access to the outdoors during these stressful times.

Over the past several months, the staff and dedicated volunteers at Mount Diablo State Park have done an incredible job ensuring that the park remains open and that all visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience. Despite the statewide shelter in place order that went into effect on March 19, we have noticed a significant increase in visitation. This has forced us to find new and innovative ways to allow safe access to the park.

In support of the state's response to slow down the spread of COVID-19, Mount Diablo State Park closed its campgrounds, visitor centers, paved roads and parking lots on March 27 to discourage large crowds. However, the park was still able to have many people enjoy Mount Diablo on foot, bicycle, and horseback. We reopened the paved roads and parking lots to vehicular traffic on May 29, and reopened the family campgrounds on June 22. At the time of this printing, group campgrounds and visitor centers remain closed, and we have had to cancel many longstanding special events.

As California State Parks continues working with local agencies on a phased and regionally-driven approach to increase access to state park units, it is important for visitors to continue to practice physical distancing and avoid congregating with people outside their immediate household. Everyone has the responsibility to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including in the outdoors. **State Parks reminds the public to follow all state and local public health guidelines.**

For more information about the latest efforts the department has taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, please visit www.parks.ca.gov/FlattenTheCurve.

MDIA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN Stephen Smith



I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I am stressed out! I haven't been able to gather with my friends nor have I seen my extended family in many months. My colleagues are just images on a Zoom screen and vacations are a thing of the past. I am thankful that one of my favorite things in the world is

hiking, and what a relief it is that we have Mount Diablo right here to offer up its 162 miles of dirty goodness.

Yes the hills are golden brown now and many of the flowers have faded, the landscape is parched and the earth is cracked. But you know what, I'll take it. I will delight in spotting that tarantula gliding across the trail, or that golden eagle soaring overhead. Is that a horned lizard camouflaged in the brush? Have you seen that particular cerulean blue sky or that pop of scarlet red honeysuckle contrasting against the grasses? Maybe you are reading this as we head into winter and the mighty oaks are but wiry skeletons dotting the hillsides. Perhaps dirt has turned to mud or even snow. Is that a tinge of green in the grass, or the beginning trickles of a waterfall?

When I turn on the news and find only political strife, social injustice, and health crises, I long to be transported to a different world where I can just focus on something natural and transformative. Humans have been blessed with a deep appreciation for that which is beautiful, and Mount Diablo has that in spades. So if you too are feeling stressed, sad, angry, or overwhelmed, get out into the wilds of our mountain and let it all fall away as you contemplate simpler things. Let nature heal you and let the dusty trail lead you to your own bliss.



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Signs of Success

completing his second "Hike Them All" trail challenge, inspired the Denslows to attempt it too, and this is where their purpose and passions aligned.

With power tools in tow, Scott and Terri did more than conquer their two-fold goal of replacing trail signs and circumnavigating the park, they also revitalized their interest in the wild things around them. Each hike became a natural history lesson, filled with wonder. Where once Scott couldn't tell the difference between a turkey vulture and a red-tailed hawk in flight, he was soon identifying not only the endemic wildflowers skirting the trails but also the butterflies that landed on them.

"So much of it is listening and watching," says Scott, who credits Dan and Steve for his newfound interest in both the park's natural history and photography. Dan, whose exceptional photos of birds and butterflies are used in several of MDIA's field guides, frequently shared tips and advice with Scott, who was a quick study: "I found that if something catches your eye, follow it into place," he says. "If it lands on something, great! And if I get a good picture? I always thank the subject."

A thousand miles and 325 hours later, Steve and his team of volunteers not only banked singular moments of wonder on their outings, they also completed the first phase of the trail sign initiative. Phase two involves ordering and installing an additional 83 signs.

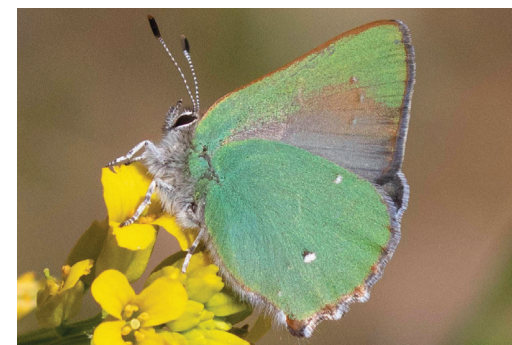
"The most gratifying element of this project," says Steve, "is the appreciation from trail users who know that good signage is sometimes rare yet so important. My hope is that visitors can focus on the park's natural beauty instead."

—by Merrik Bush

Project Volunteers: Arthur Binder, Dennis England, Scott and Terri Denslow, Dan Fitzgerald, Dick Heron, Bill Hughes, Jerry Lahr, Jim Mitchell, Dick Nicoll, Bruce Schine, Nick Sharrock, and John Villalpondo.



Terri and Scott Denslow after finishing the "Hike Them All" trail challenge.



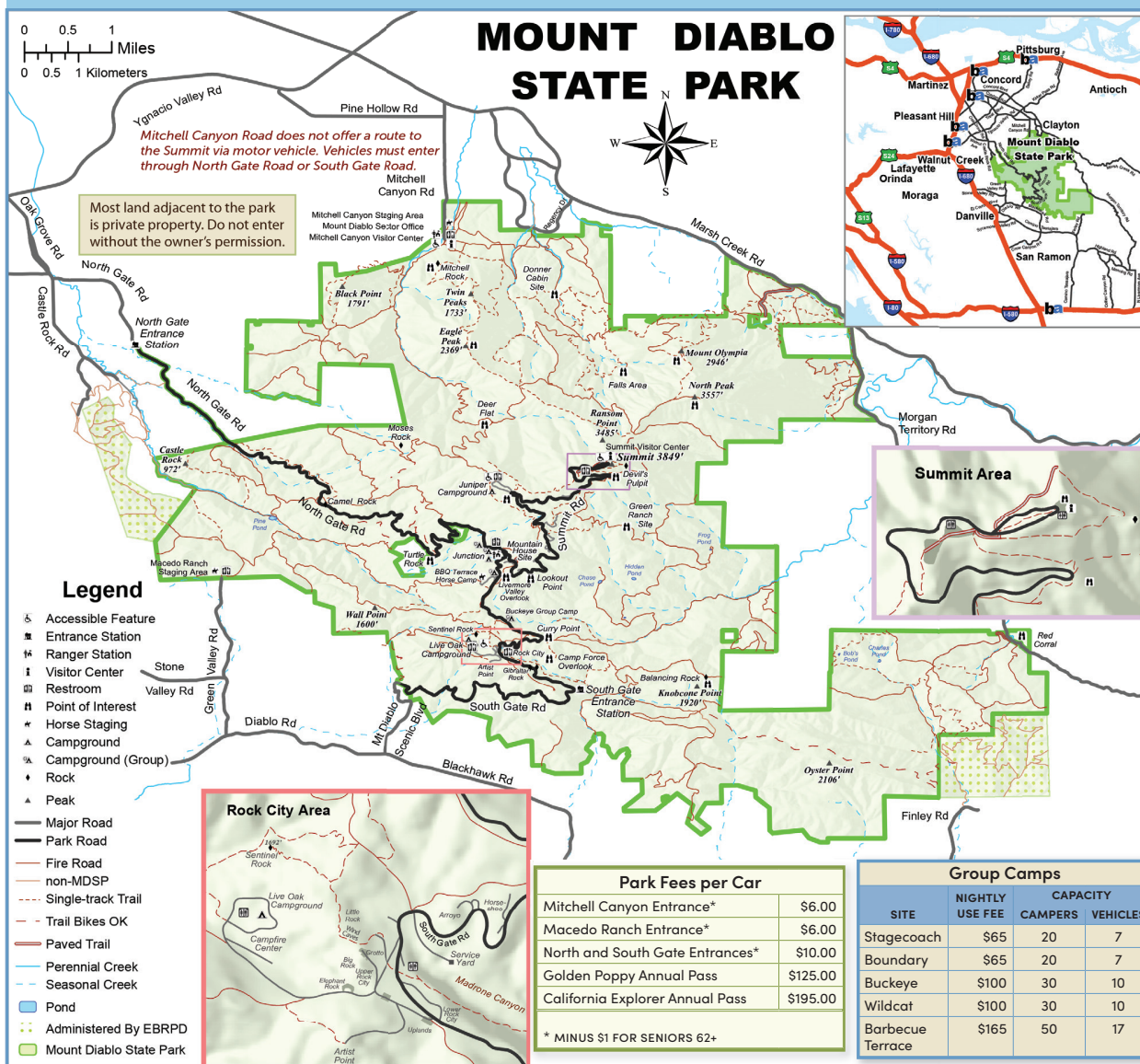
Lotus Hairstreak butterfly. • PHOTO BY DAN FITZGERALD.

Understanding Trail Signs



Trail signs in the park follow California State Parks' uniform format. The name of the trail you are on is specified in relatively small horizontal type near the top of the sign. The name that appears vertically in large type (another trail but sometimes a destination or park boundary) identifies the termination of that particular trail; note the word "TO" in small letters. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.

A more detailed topographic map is available for purchase at the entrance stations and the Summit and Mitchell Canyon visitor centers.



Camping at Mount Diablo State Park

Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps:

JUNIPER CAMPGROUND (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) Located approximately two miles below the summit, on Summit Road, Juniper is known for its fantastic views. Three campsites meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. **Reservations available.**

LIVE OAK CAMPGROUND (23 sites, elevation 1,450 ft.) Located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, off South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. **Reservations available.**

JUNCTION CAMPGROUND (6 sites, elevation 2,200 ft.) Located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. **Available on a first-come, first-served basis only.**

GROUP CAMPS are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary. Each campground is primitive with running water (subject to availability) and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. RVs are not allowed in the group camping areas. **Please check the state park website for status.**

■ All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water (subject to availability) and restrooms. Showers are available at Juniper and Live Oak campgrounds at no additional charge.

■ The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, but can accommodate RVs up to 20 ft. in length. No hookups and dumping stations are provided.

Camping Procedures

Make reservations up to six months in advance using the ReserveCalifornia website at reservecalifornia.com. To view a map of the campgrounds and for additional info, please visit mdia.org/camping.

Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

During the fire season (generally May to October) the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925-837-2525 or 925-837-0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

General Rules

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- Eight people and two vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent's phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. **NO GROUND FIRES.**
- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 6).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.
- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate campground or picnic area.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: The Desert Tarantula (*Aphonopelma iodium*)

Mount Diablo's Gentle Giants

Despite the tarantula's frightening appearance, this large furry spider is no threat to humans. It's actually docile, shy, and surprisingly fragile. Nocturnal and reclusive, Mount Diablo's resident species—the desert tarantula—spends most its time hunkered down in a burrow. But once a year, from late August through mid-October, they create a brief but striking spectacle when mature males emerge from their dens to find their once-in-a-lifetime loves. The female, who remains in her burrow, lines the quarter-sized entrance of her den with silk to announce her readiness. The male, using his hairs as sensors, seeks out the pheromone trail to her den and taps on her silken front door. If interested, she'll emerge to mate, then retreat with his sperm, which she may later use to fertilize her eggs. Since she may mate with several suitors in one season, it's lady's choice. His job done, the short-lived male then wanders the trails until he dies, usually within a month or so after mating. Unfortunately, with climate change and increased car and foot traffic, these single-minded suitors face increasing hurdles. So if you see a wandering spider the size of a mouse, count yourself lucky. Take selfies from a respectful distance and, **per park rules, do not touch, handle, collect, or otherwise interfere with their seasonal courtship ritual.** Next year's spiderlings thank you!



DID YOU KNOW . . .

- Females can live up to 25 years, while males live around 7 years
- Males spend 4 to 7 years maturing in their burrows before leaving to find a mate
- They molt several times as they mature and can regrow body parts, including legs
- An egg sac can hold up to 150 spiderlings, but only 2 or 3 survive to adulthood
- Despite myths, females do not eat males after mating—unless they're very hungry
- Their bodies are extremely fragile. If dropped, their exoskeleton can crack and they will die
- Their venom is harmless to humans and they rarely bite unless in self-defense
- Their primary food source includes insects and other arthropods, such as scorpions
- Each leg ends in two to three tiny claws that help with traction and retract like a cat's



FIRE DANGER CHART						
Fire Danger Reading	Wood fire permitted in stoves and BBQ pits (designated picnic and campsites)	Use of Compressed Logs	Use of Charcoal	Use of Self-contained Stove	Cigarette Smoking	Park Closed
LOW	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
MEDIUM	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
HIGH	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
HIGH WITH RED FLAG	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
VERY HIGH/EXTREME	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

¹ THE PROHIBITION OF SMOKING UNDER HIGH FIRE DANGER INCLUDES SMOKING WITHIN A VEHICLE.

² PARK CLOSURE APPLIES TO ALL HIKERS, VEHICLES, BICYCLISTS (MOUNTAIN AND ROAD), AND HORSEBACK RIDERS.

Fire Danger: How Will It Affect You?

- Maintain fires at all times in a safe condition that does not threaten any person or natural or structural feature.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Extinguish all fires prior to departure.
- Ground fires are not permitted.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Report all wildfires immediately. Call 911.

Explore Mount Diablo Online

MDIA.org, the website of the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, is your go-to resource for all things related to Mount Diablo State Park. Whether you're looking for great hikes, points of interest, or a list of seasonal wildflowers, you will find a variety of interactive online tools to help you better plan your visit and enjoy the park before, during, and after your stay. In addition to practical up-to-date information about emergency closures, camping, and visitor center hours, our newly expanded website also includes online guides to Mount Diablo's unique flora, fauna, and geology. For those looking for park souvenirs, clothing, or printed books and field guides, our online shop is quick and easy to use. And if you're interested in volunteering in the park or becoming a member of MDIA, we've got a tab for that too.

Visit MDIA.org today to learn more!

- Directions, admission fees, and park information
- Campground, picnic, and visitor center information
- Guide to popular hikes (by level of difficulty)
- Schedule of events and activities
- Guide to butterflies of Mount Diablo
- Guide to wildflowers of Mount Diablo
- Guide to birds of Mount Diablo
- Natural history webinars
- Videos and podcasts about the park
- Convenient search feature
- Online store and membership information
- Learn about volunteer opportunities



For more information about volunteering, email volunteer@mdia.org or leave a phone message at 925-927-7222.

Become an MDIA member today!



Use your smart phone to join now or shop online.
<https://mount-diablo-interpretive-association.square.site/>

SIX LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP:		PRODUCTS:
Senior (55+)	\$15	• Maps
Student	\$15	• Nature Guides
Individual	\$25	• Hiking and History Guides
Family	\$40	• Clothing
Contributing	\$100	• Bicycle Jerseys
Lifetime	\$500	



Park Rules

You are responsible for obeying these and other Park rules

- **All Features of the Park Are Protected!** Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
- **Park Hours:** Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at sunset. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out at sunset to avoid being locked in.
- **No Alcohol:** All alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- **Vehicles/Bicycles Speed Limit:** 15 to 25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
- **Bicycles** are allowed only on paved roads, fire roads, and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.
- **Drones or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)** are prohibited.
- **Skateboards**, rollerblades, rollerskates, and gravity-propelled devices are prohibited.
- **Dogs:** Must be on leash at all times when out of your car; must be in tent or a vehicle at night; and must stay in developed areas—they are not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- **Fires:** Restrictions in effect during season. Check with a Ranger. Fires must be in fire pits or barbecues provided—no ground fires.
- **Emergencies:** Dial 911.
- **Fireworks** are prohibited.
- **Firearms**/airguns and hunting are prohibited.

Mount Diablo State Park Phone Numbers

General information..... 925-837-2525
Summit Museum 925-837-6119
Junction Ranger 925-837-6129
TTY Relay Service..... 711

MAILING ADDRESS:
(NOT FOR VEHICLE ACCESS)

Mount Diablo State Park
96 Mitchell Canyon Road
Clayton, CA 94517-1500



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the Contra Solano Sector Office, 925-673-2891. This newsletter is available in alternate formats by contacting 925-673-2891.

**PASS
WITH
CARE**

Rules of the Road for Motorists and Cyclists



Share the roadway with all Park users.

- Drive at or below the posted Park speed limits.
CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 22350*
- Pass with sufficient visual clearance
CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21751 *
- Do not pass on blind curves.
CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21752(A)*
- Give bicyclists 3 feet clearance.
CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21760(b)*
- Yield to equestrians.
CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21759*

*MINIMUM FINE: \$238



Please remember to give cyclists 3 feet of clearance when you're driving on Mount Diablo. It's the law.