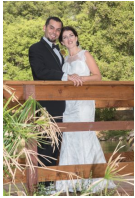




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A Hiker's Paradise: Oakoasis County Preserve



By Angela McLaughlin - Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Apr 05, 2018

The recent rains have ushered in a beautiful spring — and with blooming flowers and emerald-green hillsides, it is a wonderful time to hit the trails.

Oakoasis County Preserve provides an unexpected mix of landscapes, resulting in a unique hike that's sure to please. Just a short drive from Ramona, the trailhead is located at 12620 Wildcat Canyon Rd.

The start of the trail leads hikers through a riparian habitat that is home to many species of birds, acting as a nesting spot for migratory birds. With views of the surrounding foothills in the distance, it is a beautiful way to begin the adventure.

The Oakoasis County Preserve trail guides hikers into oak woodland, one of three habitat types found along the path. The trail soon splits, and for the purpose of this article, we will follow it to the left. A narrow dirt path winds its way through various plants and large boulders before slowly entering into oak woodland.

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Towering trees begin to line the trail, and hikers are sure to notice the black, scorched bark on the trees. This area was ravaged by the 2003 Cedar Fire, which burned more than 95 percent of the 400-acre preserve.

As many oak species found in the area have adapted to endure after a fire, the gigantic trees survived the devastation.

As you enter the shaded woodland, the stark contrast between the black trunks and vibrant green grass and moss is a sight to behold. The woodland is another popular area for birdwatchers. Footsteps fall softly on the dirt ground, and the sounds of nature surround you as you make your way through the woods. At one point, hikers will notice a trail on the right, but should continue straight to stay clockwise around the loop — the trail on the right is where you will exit.

Eventually, the path leads hikers out of the woodland, and the plants begin to transition to low-growing chaparral. The trail steadily rises and becomes rockier, as views open up to the surrounding valleys. Following the trail around a corner, hikers are soon rewarded with a view of San Vicente Reservoir.

You will see a sign for a viewpoint, and if you want to experience something fantastic, I suggest you take a quick detour to the left. The trail leading to the viewpoint opens up to a large rocky area overlooking the reservoir, offering even more astounding views. It is the perfect place to rest and, perhaps, have a picnic.

The time will soon come to leave the gorgeous views and head back to the main trail. Be careful of your footing, as the rocky, undulating trail is a bit more difficult in this area. The path climbs a bit before descending from chaparral into lower riparian habitat once again.

By this point, you're sure to feel the spike in your heart rate, and you will come across a sign marking the halfway point. Never fear — you have already passed through the most difficult part, and though there are a few small hills, the trail is relatively flat for the rest of the hike.

You will pass by several large rock formations along the way, stunning in their stature against the sky. Your entrance into the

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oak woodland is a sign that the loop is coming to an end. The path circles around to connect with the original trail. Take a left and then a right, following the signs that say "parking" to return to the trailhead.

As with any hiking adventure, be sure to plan and pack accordingly — wear proper clothing and footwear, and pack enough water for the entire hiking party. A first-aid kit is recommended, and it is a good idea to travel with a companion or let someone know where you will be hiking.

At about 2.5 miles round-trip, the hike may be considered easy-to-moderate in terms of difficulty. It is popular with families, as it is more manageable than many hikes in the area. There are several offshoots from the main trail, some of which connect to the trans-county trail system and others leading to various loops, trails or parking and camping areas. Follow signs that say "trail" to stay on the main loop. There are restrooms at the parking area.

With the springtime rainfall, the preserve is flourishing with greenery and flowers — lilacs and other beauties are beginning to bloom. Now is the perfect time to hit the trail and enjoy the natural loveliness of this unique preserve.

For information or to recommend a local trail, email angelamclaughlin@ramonajournal.com.

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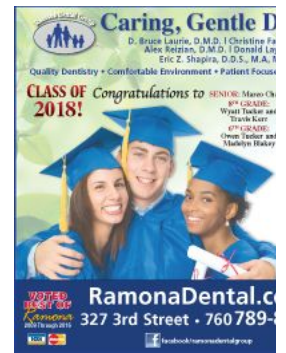
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