Welcome

This is the Deer Valley Trail, one of two trails that are on the USC Wrigley Institute campus. This trail will take you through an Island chaparral and grassland ecosystem. Be on the lookout for wildlife such as the Catalina quail and Catalina Island fox as you hike. Please feel free to use this guide while you hike along this path—it was designed to help enhance your experience along the Deer Valley Trail. So others may enjoy the same experience, please return this guide once you have completed your hike.

Points of Interest

(1) The trail connects to the main road. It is 0.6 miles long and has a north-facing slope. It was designed to be sustainable and low-impact in order to preserve the natural ecosystem and to prevent soil erosion that would affect the stability of the trail. During the construction of the trail, the builders made sure that water would sheet downward across the trail, instead of accumulating and causing dips or channelization. On the hike, you might encounter low hanging branches and may feel as though you are crawling through tunnels. The footpath may even seem a bit narrower compared to ordinary trails. This was all an effort to keep the trail as natural and wild as possible.

(2) Before the summer of 2011, this area was completely dominated by a massive fennel monoculture that was over 12 feet tall at the highest points. Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare) is a highly invasive plant that is spreading through the coastal regions of California and Mexico. On this trail, it completely crowded out the meadow and deprived other plants in the area of sunlight, root space, and groundwater. A group of USC interns spent their entire summer working hard to remove the invasive plants and restore the ecosystem to its natural state. They were fortunate to have the dedicated support of volunteer groups from the Catalina Island Conservancy and the Los Angeles Conservation Corps.

(3) You are standing in a grove of Toyon trees, (Heteromeles arbutifolia), part of the Rose Family. These plants are native from California, including Santa Catalina, to Baja Mexico. Toyon trees used to be quite common in Los Angeles. In fact Hollywood was named after a dark leaved plant with red berries, which was believed to be holly. However, the area was covered with Toyons and if it had been named properly many people would be living and working in Toyonwood!

(4) Catalina Island has a Mediterranean climate with hot dry summers and most precipitation occurring during the winter. This rockface is part of a drainage that receives runoff from rainfall during the winter months, creating a waterfall. Catalina is home to seven endemic plant species that occur only on Catalina and nowhere else. Three of those endemic plants grow on this rockface: the Catalina Liveforever, the Catalina Bedstraw, and the St. Catherine’s Lace or Catalina Island Buckwheat. The Catalina Liveforever grows near the top of the rockface and is the only endemic which is a succulent. The Catalina Bedstraw is related to the coffee plant and grows near the right side of the rock face. The St. Catherine’s Lace grows near the bottom right of the rockface. Look for its white flowers in the spring or deep russet flowers in the fall.
Here lies a beautiful grove of Island Scrub Oaks (*Quercus pacifica*), which are native to the Channel Islands. It is nicknamed the “picnic oak” for its array of branches that serve as perfect seats for an afternoon lunch. These oaks are a part of the Island Chaparral plant community. The Chaparral ecosystem requires periodic fires to survive and is highly flammable. Many plant species need a fire cue (heat, smoke, ash) in order to germinate.

Down below you can see the coast from Big Fisherman’s Cove below to the West End of Catalina. Part of those waters have been set aside as a Marine Protected Area (MPA). The MPA allows for snorkeling, diving and boating but no fishing or anchoring. This trail was designed to be low impact in order to help reduce impacts on the marine area below. By using design elements to minimize erosion, this trail should avoid runoff, which would negatively impact the marine ecosystem.

In this area, you can see California crososoma, indian paintbrush and black sage; all native to the island. The black sage was used for cooking by the Tongva Native Americans whom inhabited Catalina. They canoed out to the island and lived using the resources of the ocean, most notably abalone, and used the water and plants from the land. Archaeological sites are common on Catalina and must be left undisturbed in order to preserve the history of the Island.

This spot marks the end of trial. If you like, you may either return on the trail or just turn to the right and walk down the road to return to the Wrigley Institute or walk up and you will pass the campgrounds and reach Two Harbors. If you are feeling really adventurous you can turn left and explore the interior of the island.

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