

News and Links

Tom Chester's Native and Introduced Plants of Southern California website is a priceless collection of identification tips, plant lists for specific regions, and descriptions of trails across southern California:

<http://tchester.org/plants/index.html>

The San Diego Natural History Museum's developing Plant Atlas site is an excellent source of additional botanical info:

<http://www.sdplantatlas.org>

Ione Chaparral

The place was surreal. It was twilight when I finally arrived along this rural California by-way. Long abandoned mining activity was the first thing I noticed, having exposed large deposits of fine, white sands and strange layers of ancient marine sediments all laid down 35 to 57 million years ago during the Eocene; high acidity, lots of aluminum and lousy fertility. One mining pit was filled with water, colored powder-blue from the dissolved minerals and fine sands.

Everything living thing looked stunted, stooped, vulnerable. I jumped over a shallow drainage ditch



Past Land Use. Isolated individuals of sticky whiteleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos viscida*) are associated with Ione manzanita. Mine pit filled with water in background.

next to the road to get a better look and it took me awhile to recognize what was under my feet. Creeping along the ground in low mounds were the inter-mingled mats of my quest, Ione manzanita (*Arctostaphylos myrtifolia*), the diminutive namesake of this isolated patch of fragile ecology; the town of Ione itself lies about three miles to the north. First identified in 1886 by Charles Parry, the species survives on a geological island of



Ione Chaparral. Olive green mounds just over one foot tall are individual Ione manzanita shrubs.

approximately 1000 acres, portions of which are being preserved through a cooperative effort between the land owner and various interested parties (including the California Native Plant Society).

Exploring the site with me was Ione native Chris Waters, the Vegetation Management Coordinator for the CDF's Amador-El Dorado Unit near Placerville. He guided me through the elfin landscape, relating stories of his family's long history in the area as well as his adventures while growing up. "It's hard to imagine now," Chris remembered, "but last winter this entire hillside was covered in white from all the manzanita in bloom."

As we dropped down into a small arroyo, we observed an unsettling scene. Large mats of manzanita had died, leaving behind only pale, woody skeletons.

More to come...

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Summit: Living with Fire in Chaparral Ecosystems: Providing Tools for Decision Makers.

**January 10-12, 2006 at the
Riverside, California Convention Center.**

For details and reservations:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/chaparral>

Ione Chaparral: Part II

APOLOGIES! In our previous newsletter, you may have noticed that our last "Ione Chaparral" article ended rather abruptly. Gnomes from the elfin forest apparently removed the "To be continued..." notation.

Continued from FB #16...

Both Chris and I scanned the patches of dead manzanita. I stared and shook my head, "What's happening here?" Chris didn't know and it was difficult to discern any obvious signs as to cause by examining the plants in the field. It was hard to determine how long the plants had been dead, but probably no more than 5 years as nearly all the stems were still intact.



Dead lone manzanita. Notice the area under and around the dead plants has been filled in with invasive, alien grasses.

A study of the community in 1964 didn't mention any unusual rates of mortality. However, we do know the die back was present at least since 1988 due to more recent investigations. According to George Hartwell, a talented naturalist who once lived in the area, the fungus responsible for madrone canker (*Fusicoccum aesculi*) was found in Ione manzanita tissue by plant pathologist Tim Tidwell at the Department of Food and Agriculture. Another fungus that causes root and crown rot



A healthy lone Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos myrtifolia*)

(*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) was found to be infecting the plants in 2001 as reported by California Dept. of Fish and Game. The full document can be downloaded from here:

<http://phytosphere.com/publications/ionemanzdis.htm>

Drought stress may be the primary cause of the problem followed by secondary fungal infections. Whatever the cause for the die off, the future for the remaining stands of manzanita is unclear. Continued mining activities and possible development pose additional risks to the isolated plant community.

Currently BLM manages two reserves of 86 and 20 acres each with CalTrans managing populations along its rights-of-way. Large portions of Ione chaparral are on the private Arroyo Seco Ranch. According to Chris, the ranch owners are interested in protecting the endangered system. However, the local political climate does not appear conducive to preservation as evidenced by the words of a former Amador County planning commissioner.

To be continued...

Ione Chaparral

Final Installment

The natural resource value of the unique Ione chaparral plant community south of Placerville, California is lost on some of the region's local politicians. According to a botanist familiar with the area, a former Amador County planning commissioner once advised landowners in a public meeting to "join arms and walk in lock-step," ripping out rare plants as they found them. "Tell them you're hunting rattlesnakes," if anyone asks what you're doing, he advised.

This is not an uncommon attitude and can be directly traced back to fundamental attitudes about the role the natural environment can play in supporting the quality of life in California. Unfortunately, the importance of nature as a fundamental American value is not properly recognized. Even environmentalists who seek its protection fail to understand its power to unify unlikely allies. Rather than being seen as a shared value that can bring people together in a positive manner, nature is sliced up into a litany of never ending, single issue battles that focus on mitigating loss rather than creating a long term vision of hope for protecting our nation's natural heritage.

Wildness defines our character as a people. Most everyone can agree that nature is a beautiful thing and there is value in protecting it. It would be wise to focus on that agreement, stop the bickering, and develop a consensus on how much native, wild space we want. With the rapid pace of growth, leaving the decision up to future generations is no longer an option. The challenge is to preserve enough native, wild space so children 100 years from now can still enjoy feeling a true "sense of place" that only comes from understanding and appreciating their local, natural environment.



Chaparral remnant. Patches of chamise like these are all that remain of thousands of acres of chaparral that once dominated the foothills in Amador County.

Please Join the California Chaparral Field Institute and support our research and educational efforts to help promote a better understanding and appreciation for California's most characteristic wilderness, the chaparral!

\$30 Citizen Naturalist: Fire Bulletin plus one additional benefit (check preference below).

\$50 Chaparralian: Fire Bulletin plus TWO additional benefits (check preferences below).

Signed Book: "Fire, Chaparral and Survival in Southern California"

DVD of the KPBS/Huell Howser's California's Green "Secrets of the Chaparral" show

California Chaparral T-Shirt. Please circle size: S M L XL

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