



UPWARDS THROUGH THE WILDFLOWERS

By Meade Fischer

There are hiking destinations along California's central coast that attract a dedicated band of regulars. One of these is Garland Ranch Regional Park in Carmel Valley. While there is a hard core of folks who hike and run there weekly, Garland is never more popular than in the spring, hosting a stunning mix of wildflowers on both valley floor and hill sides.

A good way to get a cross section of this 4,500 acre park, (with a good selection of the many flowers the park has to offer) is to hike from the river to the top. A half day hike that gives a good aerobic workout and a visual feast.

The park, 8.6 miles on Carmel Valley Road from Highway One in Carmel, starts at the Carmel River. There is parking off the side of the road, and near the parking area, is a bridge over the river. Once on the park side of the river, follow the sign to the left for 200 yards to the visitor's center. This is the best jumping off place for exploring the western end of the park. While there, you can pick up a trail map, fill your water bottle, and take a look at books and charts that list the local flowers and birds.

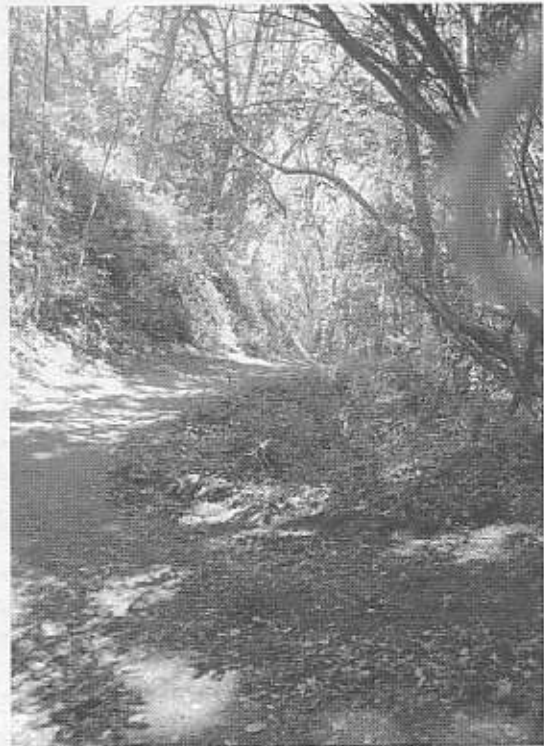
From the visitor's center, take the trail that leads across the meadow directly toward the hills. In the spring, this meadow is a blinding mix of yellow poppies and blue lupine. As the trail rises, turn left on the Lupine Loop, where you will see owl's clover, blue dicks, vetch, miners lettuce, red clintonia and western blue-eyed grass. Bay and buckeye tower over head.

After approximately one-half mile, the Lupine Loop trail intersects the Mesa Trail.

Now the climb begins. In addition to the flowers seen below, you will start to notice Indian paint brush and the occasional wild iris. When you stop to catch your breath, look down at the valley below you.

At the intersection with the Sky Trail, is the Mesa Trail which leads to the mesa itself, with fields of flowers and a small pond. Or save that for the way down and continue up the Sky Trail, where the Indian paint brush grows in big clumps, mixed with red clintonia and vetch.

I know I said this before, but this is where the climb really begins, and on a hot day it can be strenuous. Make



Fern Trail
Photo by Meade Fischer



Lupine Loop
Photo by Meade Fischer