



George F Canyon Preserve*

- **History:** In 1982, the Stein and Hale families sold the 36-acre parcel of land to the City of Rolling Hills Estates. Although the nature trail carries both of their names, the families requested that the canyon be named something other than Stein or Hale. According to a Los Angeles Times 1996 article, Donald Gales, a local historian, offered some interesting information. He had been studying the confusing story about how the canyon got named since the 1970s. He found a US Geological Survey map of the area dated 1924. The map labels the canyon “George F”. Mr. Gales also found a 1916 photograph of George H. Bixby, oldest son of Jotham Bixby, standing in front of the canyon. Jotham Bixby owned the property as part of the 16,000 acres of the Palos Verdes Peninsula he was awarded when the Sepulveda family’s Rancho de Los Palos Verdes was partitioned into seventeen portions in 1882. Gales believes that the canyon was probably named after George H. Bixby, but a typo probably occurred when the map was transcribed, typing an F instead of an H. Others believe that the canyon could be named after George Vickery, a prominent San Pedro butcher, or George Oden, a Wilmington contractor. Adding to the confusion is the fact that the city of Rolling Hills Estates calls the canyon George F Canyon (no period after the F), but the city of Rolling Hills refers to the canyon as Georgeff Canyon.
- **Habitat**

This is primarily a **riparian habitat** that is dominated by the native Arroyo Willow Trees. Riparian means taking place along or near a stream. As you move away from the stream along the trail you will also see the sage scrub habitat that is more typical of the Peninsula. Plants observed along the stream bed:

 - ✓ **Arroyo Willow:** These trees were an important part of the daily life for the NA. The bark, branches and leaves were used in basketry, for dwellings and for medicinal purposes. Look closely at the leaves and you may spot ¼ inch to ½ inch red or yellow nodules. These are called galls, and are actually the plants’ reaction to insects (in Palos Verdes usually Fly Wasps which have black abdomens) laying eggs on the leaves. The galls protect the developing larva.
 - ✓ **Poison Oak:** Poison oak does well in this habitat. Make sure you can identify the 3-leaf structure of the plant prior to your hike. Best way to avoid contact is to stay on the trail. Birds and other animals are immune to the toxins and will eat the berries. The NA used the plant for medicinal purposes.
 - ✓ **Matilija Poppy:** This perennial shrub can grow up to 8 ft tall. The large crinkly flowers which bloom in the late spring and early summer are often called fried egg flowers. The plant spreads primarily by rhizomes.
 - ✓ **Blue Elderberry:** NA called this the music tree because they made flutes and musical clapper sticks from the branches. They also used the small branches for arrow shafts. They used the flowers for a shampoo. When ripe the berries are edible and were used by the NA to make a tea for medicinal purposes and also dried to make wine, dye and a laxative. The berries are poisonous when green.
 - ✓ **Catalina Cherry:** This is a native evergreen shrub or tree, producing edible cherries, with shiny and spiny toothed leaves similar in appearance to holly. NA fermented the fruit into an intoxicating drink.
 - ✓ **Stinging Nettle:** This perennial grows from rhizomes and can reach heights of up to 6 ft. The small flowers form spikes with green male flowers above and females below that produce small, ovate fruit. NA used the stings this plant delivers to relieve arthritis; today, the plant contains compounds that are approved as an arthritis treatment in Germany. Leaves were used for a tea to treat colds. Young leaves are edible.

- ✓ **Jimson Weed:** This is either an annual or perennial low vine that has large, 6-8-inch flowers that open into a trumpet shape. Plant has spiritual importance to NA and is/was used in religious ceremonies. The plant acts as a hallucinogen when eaten and can be toxic. Was used in initiation ceremonies but sadly some NA boys died after eating the plant
- ✓ **California Fuchsia:** Plant grows in soft, 1-2 ft mounds. Flowers are red-orange funnels which grow in clusters from small stems. Hummingbirds are highly attracted to this plant.
- ✓ **Turkey Mullein:** Turkey mullein grows in summer into the fall. It prefers dry, open and often disturbed areas. Its name is derived from the fact that doves and turkeys feed on the seeds. The stem and leaves contain a narcotic poison that the NA used to stun fish.
- ✓ **Creeping Snowberry:** this is a sprawling vine with branches trailing up to 2 ft. Small pink to reddish flowers are bell shaped. The pink to white fruit is twice the size of the flowers. Berries are poisonous, but the NA used the plant to treat sores and other skin lesions. Berries were used to stun fish.
- ✓ **Sticky Monkey Flower:** This minutely hairy subshrub grows up to 4.5 ft. The sticky flowers are a showy light orange and have 5 irregularly shaped lobes. Blooms from spring to early summer. The stigma is easily seen above the throat as a white disk. When an insect or human armed with a sliver of twig touches the stigma, it closes by folding in half. But, if it has not been pollinated, it will open again.
- **Sage Scrub Habitat**
 - ✓ **Sagebrush:** Native Americans (NA) used it for medicinal purposes by making a tea to relieve cramps, pain at childbirth, and as eyewash. Also, it was used as an aromatic in sweat baths, and as an insecticide sprinkled on the floors of dwellings as a flea and tick repellent. The seeds were ground and used in a flour mixture to make flatbread similar to a tortilla. It is sometimes called “cowboy cologne”. The plant is the nesting site of the [California gnatcatcher](#).
 - ✓ **Buckwheat:** California buckwheat has dark green slender leaves and looks like rosemary. Ashy leaf buckwheat has grayish-green colored leaves. Both have pinkish flowers above the leaves that turn brown in the fall. Many birds and insects eat the seeds. The NA used the ground seeds in a flour mixture to make flatbread.
 - ✓ **Lemonade Berry Bush:** It is a large shrub with dark green leaves and red berries that ripen with a white coating that tastes sour. The NA made a refreshing drink from the berries and also roasted the berries to grind for a coffee-like drink.
 - ✓ **California Bush Sunflower:** The plant has bright yellow flowers and is a good bird habitat. The lack of water makes for dry branches that appear dead during the summer.
 - ✓ **Coyote Bush:** Separate male and female plants that produce fluffy white flowers. When in bloom the stalks resemble a coyote’s tail.
 - ✓ **Giant Rye Grass:** NA also used these seeds to ground into a flour mixture to make flatbread. The shafts were used as arrows to stun birds, and the leaves were used as thatch.
 - ✓ **Mule Fat:** This plant was at one time used for food for horses and donkeys. They, however did not like it, but the mules did and grew fat, hence the name. NA used the branches as a hand drill with tinder and a wooden block when starting fires and the long straight branches were used to make arrow shafts.
- **Geology:** As you walk along the stream bed you may spot very hard bluish-gray, reddish-purple, or greenish colored rocks. This is Catalina schist, which forms the bed rock of the peninsula as well as the entire Los Angeles area. Catalina schist is a metamorphic rock formed 150 million years ago, during the Jurassic era, when the Pacific plate started moving under the North America plate. This is **one of the few locations in Los Angeles county where Catalina schist can be observed**

* Jay Fodor July 2019. Notes based on a training hike with Henry Jurgens July 2019. Historical references based on docent class paper titled “George F Canyon” written by Debbie Owens, 2016.

