Station #13

Indian Banana Yucca

Yucca baccata

These plants were extremely useful to the Indians of the southwest. The fruits were split open, the seeds removed and dried in the sun. This dried fruit, along with grass seeds and venison, was the chief food of the early Navajo warriors when they journeyed over great distances.

In addition to their use as food, some yucca plants were used for their leaf fibers. The leaves were soaked in water until soft, then they were weaved into mats, cords, baskets, etc. The roots were sometimes crushed and used for soap. This natural cleanser was highly prized by the Indians, especially the Hopi.

Station #14

Fisher's Peak (Elevation 9,655 ft.)

There are many legends attributed to the naming of this peak. The one most accepted is that on August 6, 1846, Captain Waldemar Fisher (an officer in command of Company B, Major Clark's Battery of Artillery) climbed the peak. The Captain's alleged venture was part of the invasion of the west by Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny's Army. Kearny's troops marched from Bent's Fort into the Republic of Mexico.

Directly west of Fisher's Peak is Raton Pass which once served as a crossing point for the Mountain Branch of the Sante Fe Trail. From a camping and resting area in the vicinity of Trinidad, this trail left the Purgatoire River to begin the steep and arduous ascent up Raton Pass. It continued down into New Mexico and its destination, Sante Fe.

Station #15

Trinidad Dam

Created by the Army Corps of Engineers, the dam serves as a multipurpose project for flood control, irrigation storage and recreation—in that order. The earthen-fill dam is 6,860 feet long, and 200 feet high. The lake is approximately three miles long and one mile across at its widest point. The dam was completed in 1979 at a cost of $44 million.

COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

Levsa Canyon Self-guided Trail

AT TRINIDAD LAKE STATE PARK

cpw.state.co.us

Park and Trail Background

The Levsa Canyon Self-guided Trail was interpreted with the intention of pointing out some of the area's history through specific native plants and significant landmarks. There are 15 viewing stations along the trail and each is explained in this guide. The trail forms a loop approximately one mile long. There are no water or restroom facilities on the trail.

Introduction to the Piñon-Juniper Forest

You are about to explore the piñon-juniper forest, one of Colorado's most dynamic ecosystems. Often called the Pigmy forest, this ecosystem is marked by short, drought-tolerant trees such as the piñon pine and one-seed juniper. Other defining characteristics include: coarse, well-drained soils; only 10-20 inches of precipitation per year; and wildlife specially adapted for the dry, and sometimes harsh, conditions. Among the ecosystems of Colorado, the piñon-juniper forest is second only to the grasslands, in terms of wildlife species diversity. This area hosts unique species such as the piñon jay, roadrunner, piñon mouse, and collared lizard, along with providing a crucial wintering area for elk, deer and mountain lion.

Regulations

The Levsa Canyon Self-guided Trail was built and is maintained for your enjoyment. In order to preserve your trail and keep it enjoyable for other visitors, we ask that you please not pick the plants, keep all pets leashed, and do not operate motorized vehicles on the trail.

Station #1

Piñon Pine

Pinus edulis

The piñon is a common, widely distributed tree in the southwestern United States, primarily in Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado.

A slow-growing and long-living tree, the piñon produces large seed crops every three to four years. When this occurs, the trees become laden with woody pinecones that are filled with the prized piñon nuts. These seeds—very important to wildlife—are pleasant tasting and fairly nutritious and at one time were highly prized by southwestern Indian tribes. With their shells and coats removed, the piñon nuts were ground into a meal and used to make cakes or to thicken soups.

Station #2

One-Seed Juniper

Juniperus monosperma

The one-seed juniper is a common tree of the plateaus, foothills and plains of the western United States, especially on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Like the other junipers, this one is very slow-growing and may live for 500 to 600 years or more under good conditions. Although some fruit is produced each year, fruit and seed production tends to be cyclic, with large crops every two to three years. The Indians once gathered and ate juniper fruits, which now serve as a food source for deer, quail, fox, chipmunks and squirrels. The wood of the juniper was used by native Indians for prayer sticks, war bows, and other instruments and the bark was used to obtain a green dye to color their wool.

Station #3

Gamble's Oak

Quercus gambelii

Gamble's oak is the most common deciduous oak in much of the Rocky Mountains. It extends from Utah and Wyoming south into northern New Mexico. This is a slow-growing tree that flowers in spring with the acorns maturing in the autumn of the same year. As with other oaks, acorn production is cyclic. Deer, wild turkeys, bears, squirrels and jays eat the sweet acorns. Cattle, horses, deer and porcupines browse the leaves.

Note: Leaves of this species vary considerably in size and shape. Shrubs which are similar but have more definitely-lobed leaves are also Gamble's oak.

Station #4

Rocky Mountain Juniper


Juniperus scopulorum

The Rocky Mountain juniper is a wide-ranging species, extending from central British Columbia to New Mexico and Arizona. A slow-growing tree, the Rocky Mountain juniper may live 200 to 300 years. Some fruit is produced every year, with good fruit and seed production every three to five years.

The junipers make an excellent survival food because the berries, though somewhat bitter, are edible and available through part of the winter. The inner bark is also edible and was eaten by many Indians to fight off starvation. Some Indian groups roasted and ground juniper berries using them as a coffee substitute. The berries are used commercially to flavor gin.

Station #5

Lichen

The hairy green moss-like substance that is found on these trees and rocks is known as lichen. Lichen is actually a multi-species organism comprised of a fungus, which forms the body of the growth, and one or more kinds of algae that supply its nutrient source. Both the water and the minerals required for growth are absorbed from the air. The partnership between the fungi and algae in lichen is an example of an ecological relationship known as "symbiosis." Native Americans used lichens to make dyes.

Trinidad Lake State Park

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Station #6

Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains

"Culebra"—meaning snake in Spanish—was probably applied to Culebra Creek and later to the range because of the way the creek winds its way through the valley. This range contains Colorado's southernmost 14,000-foot mountain, Culebra Peak, which stands 14,047 feet. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are tied closely with the history and culture of the southwest; the Spanish may have known of these snow-capped peaks as early as 1600. The most common explanation for designating the range "Sangre de Cristo" or "Blood of Christ" is that an unknown missionary viewed the reflection of the deep red sunset upon the peaks and, in a moment of inspiration, gave the range its religious name.

Station #7

Spanish Peaks

The Spanish Peaks are of geologic as well as historic significance. They are prime examples of "stocks"–large masses of igneous rock which thrust into layers of sedimentary rock and later were exposed by erosion. Among the most unusual features of these peaks are the great rock dikes that radiate out from the mountains like spokes of a wheel. Many of them are spectacular in height and length.

For hundreds of years, the Spanish Peaks served as a guide to the Indians and to the Spanish and Canadian trappers and traders. The Plains Indians originally named them "Huajatolla," which means "breasts of the earth." Ancient people attributed divine powers to the mountains and believed all things received sustenance from them.

Station #8

Plains Prickly Pear


Opuntia polyacantha

The prickly pear has been an important food source for man in the southwest for centuries. The Indians used the fruit and seeds. To this day, the Mexicans use not only the fruit, which they call tuna, but also the young pads or "nopalitos" for salad and as cooked green vegetables. While not frequently employed as medicines, one detailed record on the Blackfoot tribe stated that these Indians treated warts by lacerating them and applying the fuzz from this cactus to the laceration.

Station #9

Maxwell Land Grant

All of the land in front of you was once part of a land grant that represented the largest tract of land privately owned by an individual in the history of the United States. This region was originally part of 197 private land grants awarded by the government of Mexico to encourage people to settle the area. The war of 1848 between Mexico and the United States transferred the grants into U.S. ownership; however, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo bound the U.S to respect Mexican citizens' property rights. Today a large portion of the region's population is Hispanic, many of them descendants of early settlers who occupied the land grants in the area. They continue to nurture a strong and lively Hispanic culture throughout the southwest.

Station #10

Mountain Mahogany


Cercocarpus montanus

This genus of tree belongs to a small group of about ten species, all native to western and southwestern North America. These thick-leaved, almost evergreen, shrubs and trees occur in dry mountain regions. The tiny fruits are tipped with a conspicuous tail that is much longer than the enclosed seed. This tail aids in spreading the seeds by wind. The common name, mountain mahogany, is derived from the mahogany-colored hard wood. This shrub is of limited importance, but since it grows on dry exposed mountain slopes, it helps minimize soil erosion. Antelope and deer often browse the twigs and leaves, and blue grouse eat the seeds and young leaves.

Station #11

Purgatoire River

At the west end of the lake lies the Purgatoire River inlet. The full name of the river, "El Rio de Las Animas Perdidas en Purgatoria," is commonly translated as the river of lost souls in purgatory. It is widely accepted that the name derives from the destruction by Indians of a Spanish expedition of 1594-96. The souls of the dead, deprived of the last rites of the church, were condemned to wander forever in purgatory.

Station #12

Lincoln High School (LHS)

Looking directly across the lake to the south, Lincoln High School (LHS) stands out as a reminder of six small communities, (Jerryville, Piedmont, Saint Thomas, Sopris, Sopris Plaza and Viola) which were once located on the river terraces that are now the lake. Each of these communities evolved from old coal mining camps. An occasional mine entrance (most sealed by the lake) and tailings still exist as evidence of the industry that once flourished here.