

# Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Premiering a Self-Guided Tour of the Bluff Trail



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It has been a long time since Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve has been able to offer school programs on the Ranch, so we were delighted on April 16th when we started up the program again.

Board member Sheryll Ebbs greeted three teachers and 12 families from the Paso Robles Independent Study Center as they meet to try out our new program: a self-guided tour on the Bluff Trail. Since this was the initial run of the program, Sheryll stayed with them to see how it went.

We provided the teachers and parents with Self-guided Tour packets for the Bluff Trail. The packets included a map of the tour stops, information and images of each stop, an illustrated guide of common flowers found on the Bluff Trail, and the FFRP brochure. Tour topics included how to tell sea otters from kelp, the value of native plants, and human occupation of the land.

The day went amazingly well, especially as it was our first time out. After breaking up into small groups, teachers and families were able to follow along with the map showing the designated stops in the information guide. Many commented how useful these packets were.

The guide was a collaborative effort by board members Sheryll Ebbs and Rusty Burns, volunteers Duffy Burns and Susan Loganbill, and executive director Kitty Connolly. Sheryll and Rusty are on FFRP's Education Committee.

Sheryll walked with various families throughout the visit and was so impressed how they followed the numbers on the map and read the highlighted information from the packet to their children. At the same time, the students were playing and having fun taking pictures of the flowers and matching them up with the pictures in the packet. Families also saw a range of wildlife: otters, sea lions, tadpoles, a large garter snake, ground squirrels, lizards, and many birds. The children were very excited!

After the program, Sheryll received several emails from the lead teacher expressing how much she appreciated everything and sharing that the families had a great time. One family even said they were going back the next day. Parent quote:

“We had the very best time today at Fiscalini Ranch. I cannot believe we never knew about this place. Next time, we are going to do the forest trail. We saw all kinds of wildlife which made both boys very happy including baby sea lions and sea otters. The guide they provided was fabulous! Thank you so much. Made for a fun day!”

The tour is posted on FFRP's website under EDUCATION. Next on the agenda is translating the Bluff Trail program into Spanish, adapting both version for an app-based program, and creating a self-guided tour of the forest.