

Visiting California Grasslands: Walker Ridge

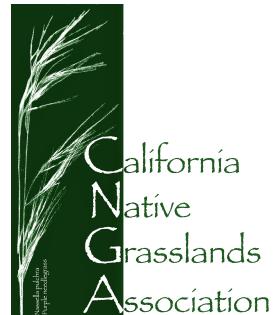
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When one thinks of grasslands, the majestic image of endless acres of waving grass may come to mind. Grasslands need not be immense swaths of waving grass, rolling on to the horizon. Many grasslands, can be small glorious pockets and patches of grasses and forbs in intimate valleys. Some can be as small as a kitchen table. In northern California, there exists a remarkable landscape that contains serpentine barrens, lush meadows, seeps, and springs on thousands of acres of public land. The area is Walker Ridge, north of Highway 20 in Colusa and Lake counties. At 10 miles long and 4 miles wide, the ridge is host to numerous native grass and wildflower species, and is known for its diversity of serpentine endemics and California rare plants.



Walker Ridge. Photo: Andrew Fulks

Access to the ridge itself is easy. Walker Ridge Road, an all-weather dirt and gravel road, runs north-south along its length. Travel along Highway 20, west of Highway 16 or east of Clear Lake, and turn north at the intersection of Walker Ridge Road and Highway 20. Travel along the road until you spot a meadow, interesting road edge, or a spur trail to hike. Visitors have the option of looking at the grasslands and flowers along the road edges, or those more adventurous can wander on the many old trails and paths that drop from the road to the lands on the east and west of the ridge. Most of the land on Walker Ridge is public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Private inholdings are well-posted so visitors will know where they are not allowed to roam without landowner permission. Loop hikes can be created by piecing together segments of old ranch roads. One suggested hike is from the intersection of Walker Ridge Road and Indian Valley Road to Signal Rock. Signal Rock is a rock formation on the top of a hill east of the road and above the intersection, readily identifiable on a USGS quad map and reachable using old roads that have since become trails. A map and use of GPS are advised, as there are no trail signs. However, the rewards for exploration and adventure are fields of common monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*), red ribbons (*Clarkia concinna*), and Oregon sunshine (*Eriophyllum lanatum*). The best times to visit for viewing annual herbs are May through June.



The mission of the California Native Grasslands Association is to promote, preserve, and restore the diversity of California's native grasses and grassland ecosystems through education, advocacy, research, and stewardship.

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