

## **April on the Hikshari' Trail**

by Wanda Naylor, April 2020

Want to get out and see some wildflowers in bloom? This little corner of Eureka was known to very few people before city management designed and implemented the 6-mile long Bay Trail along the waterfront some seven or eight years ago. Currently the southernmost section, the Hikshari' Trail, is 1.5 miles long, stretching from Herrick Park and Ride in the south to Trusdale Avenue in the north. A wide, paved trail for the entire length, it can be accessed at three different points: just past the Herrick Park and Ride parking lot, at the end of Hilfiker Lane, and at the foot of Trusdale (all off of Broadway).

To walk this trail to see wildflowers, I prefer to start in the middle. Take Hilfiker towards the bay, all the way to the PAVED parking lot at the end, just before the water treatment plant. There are no water fountains here, so bring your own water, and likewise, there are no restrooms. Walk north to the fenced private inholding about 100 yards up.

Looking out towards the bay, one can see remains of old pilings and docks. This was the industrial section of the town some 100 to 150 years ago. Old buildings, wood drying and storage racks, and the nearby railroad tracks dominated the landscape. Slowly, most of it decayed or was moved away. But one can still see big chunks of concrete along the trail. And what was left of the vegetation that was here originally? Not much. When the City, in conjunction with the Humboldt Trails Council, established a group of Volunteer Trail Stewards six and a half years ago, the volunteers found they had to deal with about 97% non-native, invasive plants.

As you look south now, you can see where the volunteers began their work. On your left, between the trail and the road, are a few dozen native shrubs planted by the volunteers: Coyote Brush, Toyon, Red-flowering Currant, as well as Willows down toward the parking lot. As you walk along, about 50 feet down is a Silk Tassel with long dangly gray "tassels". Later on, watch for Twinberry with pairs of yellow flowers.

On the right, between the trail and the marsh is a long narrow area that has been slowly converted from non-native grasses such as oats and foxtail to the plants you see today: California Tufted Hairgrass; yellow flowers will be Gum Plant or Silverweed; soft fuzzy gray-green foliage belongs to Coast Buckwheat.

The area right next to the parking lot was recently planted. The purple flowers are Douglas Iris; the bright pink pom poms are Sea Thrift, and the low clusters of yellow and white are Sea Foam. White flowers on foot-tall stalks are probably Yarrow and white flowers close to the ground might be Beach Strawberry.

The two tallest plants in this area are a Red-flowering Currant, which has just finished blooming, and a Shore Pine. Go smell them!

Continuing south and crossing the bridge, the vegetation changes. At the kiosk, you can continue to the left on the pavement as you traverse thickets of willow. Or take the gravel footpath leading to the right. It will rejoin the main trail in about a hundred yards. For more diversity, take the gravel path. Watch for a Red-Flowering Currant and the tiny flowers of Huckleberry.

As you walk the gravel trail, and it starts to curve back to the main trail, walk a dozen feet south and look for small magenta flowers. These are one of the prizes of the Hikshari' Trail, the rare Humboldt Bay Owl's Clover.

To your right and to the south, is a meadow. There are mounds of purple native River Lupine, and the yellow—unfortunately—Scotch Broom, which as its name implies, should not be here. Out in the middle of the meadow is a 6-foot tall stalk with a large “umbel” or group of flowers on top. This cow parsnip is the only one to survive of a dozen we planted!

The gravel path soon rejoins the main paved trail. If you keep walking, you will see thickets of Willow, some Alder trees, Wax Myrtle, and Cascara. Three kinds of berries grow here: the native Blackberry, Himalayan Blackberry, and one Salmonberry.

Eventually the trail comes out into a nearly pristine sandy area. Watch closely to see yellow Sun Cups and pink Morning Glory.

For more information on native plants, you can google these sites: Northcoast Chapter CNPS. To learn more about plants along the trail and/or to help with restoration efforts: Humboldt Trails Council.