

Sky Ranch and Dutra Ranch in June

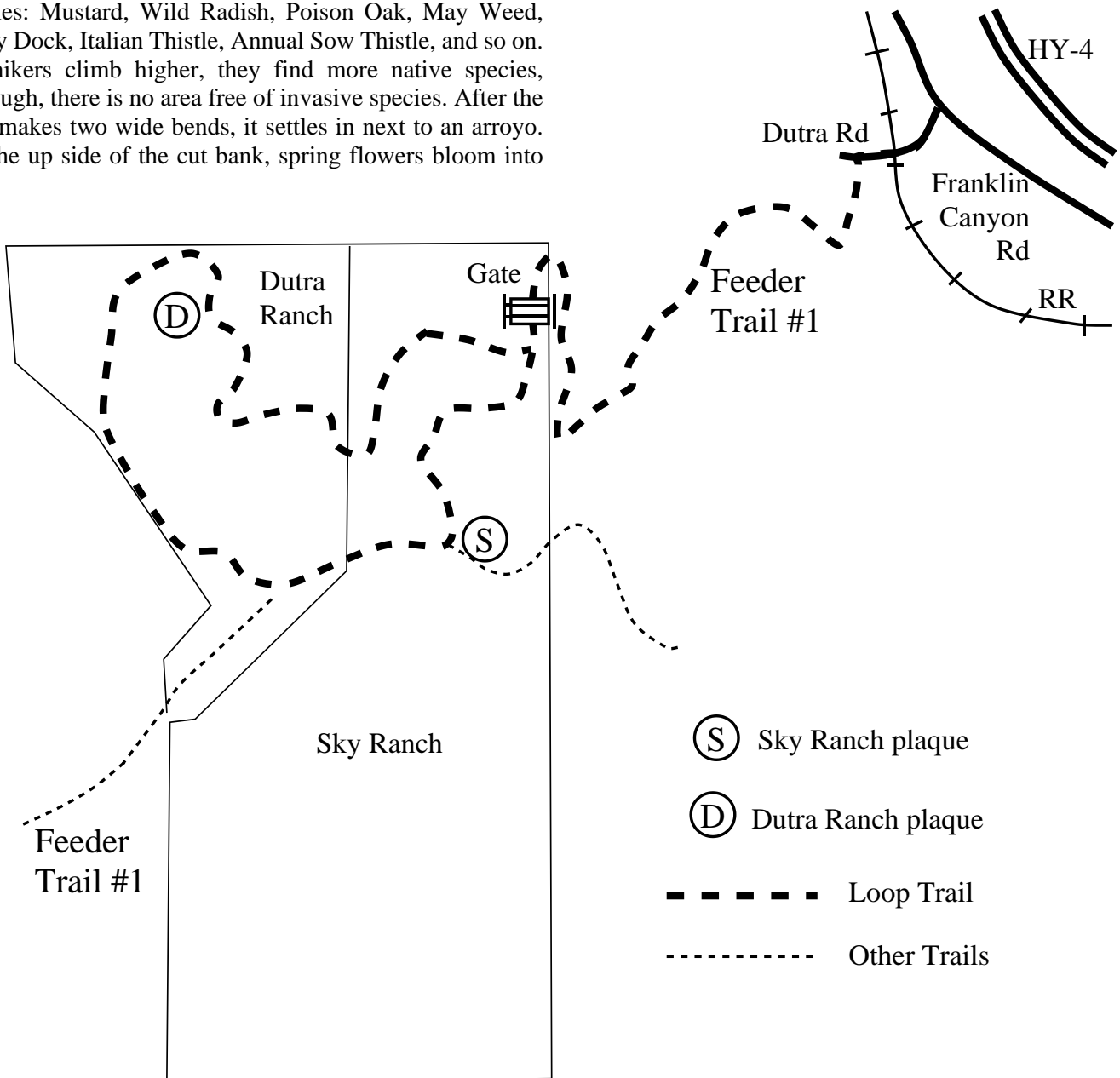
Round Trip - four miles Elevation - 800 foot climb

From Alhambra Ave in Martinez, turn onto Franklin Canyon Road, proceed for about 1 mile, then turn on Dutra Road. Dutra Road ends approximately 700 feet further. Feeder Trail #1 is on the left, at fire road gate #13-25

Feeder Trail #1 is an unmanaged trail from the 19th century, part of the Martinez-Richmond stagecoach route. Except for the annual fire road grading, the trail has little maintenance, no facilities, and no parking lot. There is room for only three or four cars on the east side of Dutra Road, at the gate. At lower elevations, the trail passes through mostly invasive species: Mustard, Wild Radish, Poison Oak, May Weed, Curly Dock, Italian Thistle, Annual Sow Thistle, and so on. As hikers climb higher, they find more native species, although, there is no area free of invasive species. After the trail makes two wide bends, it settles in next to an arroyo. On the up side of the cut bank, spring flowers bloom into

June: Coyote Mint, Elegant Clarkia, Cream Bush, Mountain Dandelion, Sticky Monkeyflower Bush, and many more.

This arroyo is typical of the East Bay hills. Bay Laurel trees dominate the lower slope, close to the seasonal watercourse. Live and Valley Oaks dominate the higher and dryer portion





Feeder Trail #1 begins at the end of Dutra Road

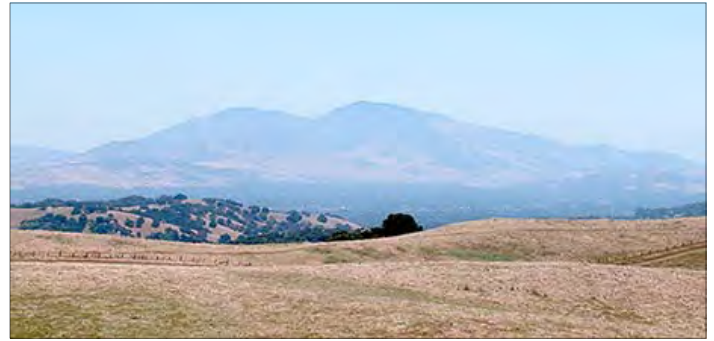
of the slope. Poison Oak is everywhere. As the trail climbs out of the arroyo, it rounds a bend to arrive at the gate of Sky Ranch, about one mile from the starting point.

Just past the gate, a signboard on the left provides a map of Sky Ranch and explains the role of the Muir Heritage Land Trust, which owns Sky Ranch and Dutra Ranch. The return loop of the hike is across from the signboard. After passing this return loop, hikers should keep to the right at all trail junctions. The road to the top is fully exposed to sun. On hot summer days, it is best to go slow and carry water. Hikers will find the Sky Ranch plaque at the top of the ridge. At this point, almost all the uphill climbing is done. A bench supplies a convenient place to rest and take in the view. Turning to the right, the road passes through a fence line and enters the Dutra Ranch. The road comes to a "Y." The Feeder Trail #1 continues on the left. The return loop through Dutra Ranch is on the right, continuing along the ridge. After about one quarter of a mile, the road takes a long sweeping bend to the right as it heads down hill. The Dutra Ranch site is at the bottom of the bend. A plaque marks the sight and an interpretative sign provides history.

After leaving the ranch site, the road traverses two folds in the hills. These are not long and deep enough to be arroyos.



Sky Ranch plaque and bench, at the top of the uphill climb, a good place for a rest.



Mount Diablo from Sky Ranch

Still, they are populated with multi-trunk Bay trees. The deep shade prevents underbrush from growing. The area gives the impression of a pleasant campsite waiting to be occupied.

As the road emerges from the deep shade, its upper cut bank



supports mounds of Cream Bush. In early June this blooming shrub has countless tiny flowers massed into clusters of foamy white. The road rejoins Feeder Trail #1 within sight of the Sky Ranch gate. The hike returns to Dutra Road by re-tracing the up-hill climb. On the down hill walk, hikers have a view across Franklin Canyon, seeing State Highway 4, and the Franklin Hills beyond. Sky Ranch and Dutra Ranch are part of the Franklin Ridge, which runs from Mount Wanda westerly to Hercules. Franklin Canyon Road and Highway 4 parallel the ridge. The Franklin Hills on the other hand start just north on Mount Wanda and run northerly to the Carquinez Strait.

At the time this is written, the county has a map of Feeder Trail #1 at:

<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/depart/cd/transportation/mapbin/FeederTrail.pdf>