## Point Defiance Loop:

A Footbill Trail With Three Distinctive Landscapes



RIDGEPORT IS AT THE WESTERN most boundary of the South Yuba River State Park. It straddles the river in a beautiful valley at 500 feet in elevation. The park is famous for its spring wildflowers and summer swimming, but it also features several interesting trails.

One of them is the Point Defiance Trail, a beautiful 2.7-mile loop trail that rewards the hiker with three distinct landscapes. Although this is not a difficult trail, be aware that the first mile is rocky in parts, and the second mile features a gradual climb to the ridge top. Anyone in decent health should have no problems.

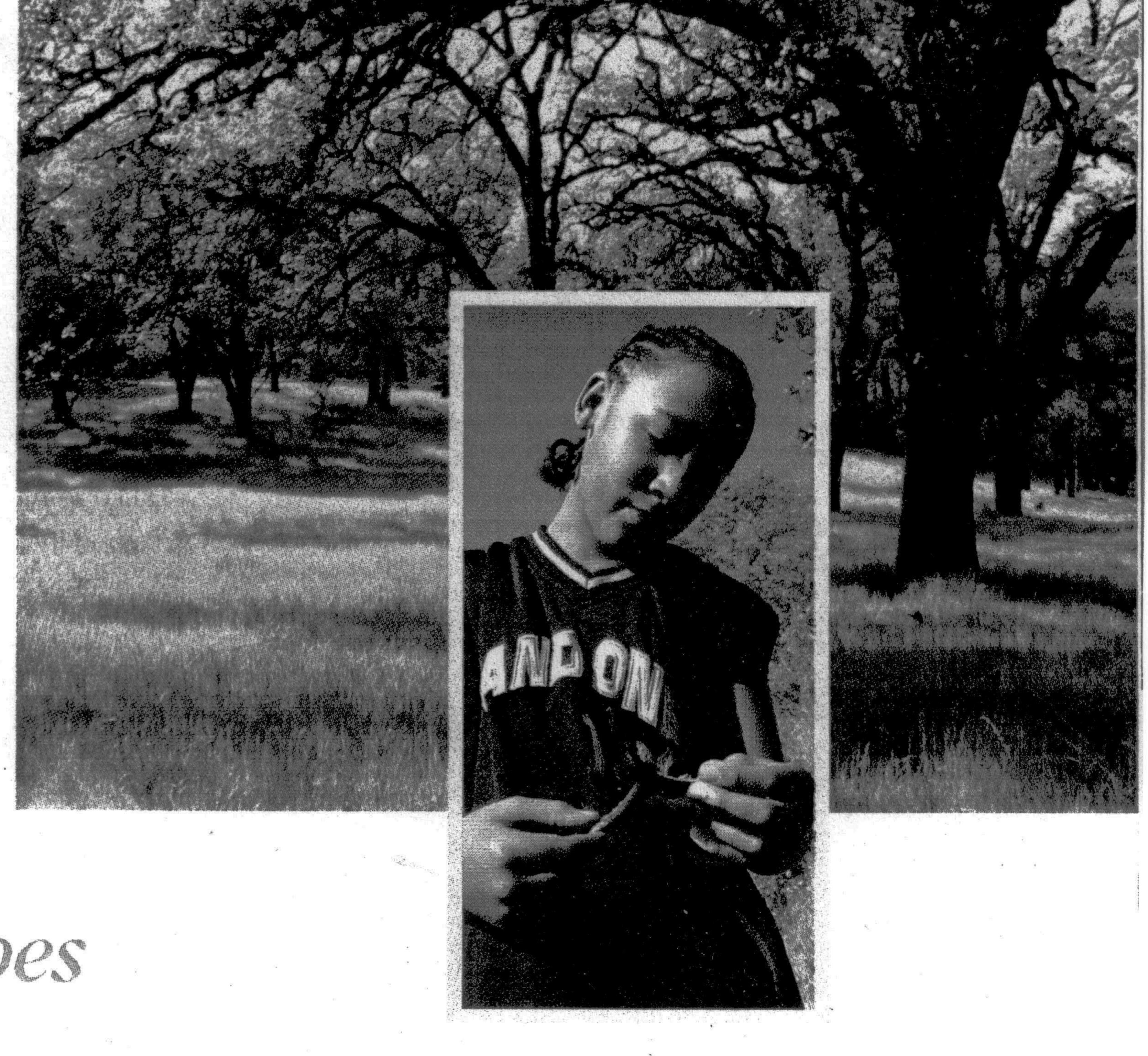
Begin on the north side of the historic 228-foot long covered bridge built in 1862 - the trailhead is clearly marked. The trail begins by traversing a steep south-facing slope shaded by live oak with several use trails descending to the river. Turn around occasionally and look upstream for some very nice views of the covered bridge.

Within a half-mile, the trail turns to the northwest where you will see enormous gravel bars on the river. Gravel from historic upstream placer mining activities continues to accumulate here at the mouth of the South Fork of the Yuba even though the largest mines stopped operating 125 years ago. Between 1849

## GETTING THERE

From the intersection of Hwy. 20 and Bitney Springs Road just west of Grass Valley, take Bitney Springs which heads north. Continue on this scenic road until it ends at Pleasant Valley Road. Make a right and descent 2.3 miles to Bridgeport.

From the intersection of Hwy. 20 and Pleasant Valley Road west of Penn Valley, drive Pleasant Valley for 7.8 miles to Bridgeport.



and 1909, more than 684 million cubic yards of gravel were released into the Yuba River. There are no big boulders on this stretch - instead there is a broad gravel beach. Here the river is broad and quiet.

A mile from the covered bridge the trail comes to Point Defiance where the South Fork enters the main trunk of the Yuba River. There are picnic tables and a toilet here because boaters from Englebright Reservoir come up this far. Englebright Dam, constructed in 1941, is seven miles downstream from this point. Blackberries dominate the area, but there are also big cottonwoods, live oak, madrone and toyon. While hiking here on a fine January morning, I saw a California woodpecker and a raccoon.

At Point Defiance, the loop trail becomes a service road (with no traffic) that continues up slope to the northeast. This road climbs 420 feet for a 0.8 mile to a grassy ridge top at 940 feet. Even though the road is on a north-facing slope and passes through dense vegetation, it can be a hot climb in the summer months. In winter there is less foliage, allowing exceptional views of the Yuba River.

On the top of the ridge everything changes to flat grassland dotted with magnificent blue oaks and rock outcroppings. Come here on a spring morning when new leaves appear and you can see the blue oaks glow as they grow. The clearly marked trail then turns to the southwest, crosses a small stream and continues out a narrow ridge to the south. At the end of this ridge is a picnic table in a splendid setting.

There are many places where you can see up the South Yuba Canyon towards Buttermilk Bend. From here the trail gradually descends, by way of several well-designed switchbacks, to the parking area adjacent to the big meadow at Bridgeport. Come back on another day or season, or hike this trail in the other direction for a different perspective and a different experience.