

By Kebi Boose

The day set for Meherana's wildflower walk dawned overcast and cool in the high 50's with rain in the forecast but still 9 people arrived bright and early for a yummy cup of chai and camaraderie before walking down to Baba's Cabin for Arti.

After Arti, all began what turned out to be a leisurely paced two-hour nature walk exploring just a fraction of the original 189 Meherana acres. Last year the wildflowers were in full bloom but this year, having surpassed the 100-year record for snowfall in March, the flowers were just starting to come out. The lupines were just a few inches high and the larkspur so prevalent last year had not yet come out to dazzle us with their vivid blue purple color but there were so many other flowers already blooming that we taxed all our minds to name them!

Here are just a few of the flowers we saw: Sierra suncup, baby blue eyes, 5-spot, filaree, fiddlesticks, popcorn, miner's lettuce (to nibble on as well as enjoy their tiny flower), and shooting stars.

Agua Fria creek was almost roaring with the rush of water down it - was that the ocean we were hearing while inside Baba's Cabin?

Our walk took us up to the highest point on the original acres and we were treated to a lovely view of snow-capped peaks to the East and also discovered a closed up old mine shaft from the gold days of the 1800's (& yes, gold is still being found in the area by those patiently sifting through the rain swollen creeks). From there we took off cross-country skillfully avoiding the beginning-to-bud poison oak stalks to wend our way to La Mineta Gulch. On our way there we passed several small streams that have appeared with the abundant rainfall - it was fun fording each of them as we delighted in the land and beauty of the day.

Nature-wise, a flock of wild turkeys and we found lots of different scat and had as many moments figuring what animal they belonged to as we did all the flowers we saw. There was also a huge wood rat home we came across plus the partially eaten skeleton of a small mole. I know that this sounds really gruesome but it was so fascinating of a find that it overcame any feelings of being yucky.

Once we got to La Mineta Gulch, we found that what is usually a quiet little stream had turned into almost a roaring current over rock and through the valley. As we walked up the creek, we delighted in the range of flowers growing along the banks as well as ferns. And, it turned out that only a couple in the group had ever been on this part of the land so we all felt like such explorers. This is certainly the time of year to explore Meherana - when the weather is cool, the grass is low, snakes not yet out, poison oak not in leaf and water and flowers everywhere!

We forded the creek and made our way to where the 189 acres met the newly purchased 101 parcel and when we got to the access road we found that the creek was so high where the road crossed that there was no way to get across and get back to the main area of Meherana to enjoy our lunch. But, looking up the creek, we spied a huge pine that had fallen creating a perfect bridge. So, up the creek we walked and had a great adventure crossing over the creek on this wonderful bridge.

Now it was time for the final leg of our journey across the well-cleared pastureland on the 101 heading back to the dining pandal and our eagerly awaited lunch.

This was such a lovely day and I, for one, was glad that all the big showy wildflowers hadn't yet made their appearance as it made for the appreciation of so many others who are of smaller and more diminutive stature but still outstanding in their beauty and abundance.

Jai Baba!