Geography 1

Physical Geography Field Project

For your Field Project you are to participate in a *structured introduction to a natural environment*. By “structured introduction”, I mean a guided nature walk or field experience offered through a state, county or city park or nature center. Several private non-profit organizations such as the Audobon Society and the Sierra Club also sponsor field trips and other nature experiences that would be acceptable. Attached is a brief list of field observation sites. You should select one of these for your study site. I will be happy to consider any others that you might propose, but **obtain my approval prior to your participation**

The specific objectives of this assignment are: 1.) to introduce you to field study and field observation techniques; 2.) to acquaint you with a natural environment in the Los Angeles area; 3) to show you first hand how the interactions of natural processes produce different natural landscapes; and 4.) to help you appreciate how human activity has modified, endangered and now preserves these natural environments.

During your participation in *structured introduction* you are to take detailed field notes. Carefully observe the distinct natural characteristics of the site. Note it’s topography and geology, its weather and its biogeography. How do these features relate to what we have discussed in class? You will be accompanying some knowledgeable authority, so don’t hesitate to ask questions. When observing features of the local landscape, distinguish between what is artificial and what is natural, between what is exotic and what is indigenous. You may need to make more than one visit. Take note of your personal impressions of this environment. Consider too the local history. There is virtually no place left in southern California that does not bear the mark of some human interaction. What did Native Americans and early pioneers see? How did they relate to this site? Legends and myths tied to a specific place can tell you much about the special qualities of a place that the earliest observers perceived.

Your task is to prepare a geographic sketch of your study area. This report will be different from other papers you may have done. You are telling the story of a particular place emphasizing its natural features. This paper should be drawn from your personal observations and informed by appropriate references. Include a map of the locality showing the important featured discussed in your paper. Your final paper must be at least 4 typewritten pages (12 point font and double spaced with normal margins). Attach copies of any literature and handouts that are provided. This project is due **November 16/17**. Late submissions will be subject to the course late policy.

**Guidelines for your field project**

This project will present some new challenges for you. The focus of your paper is not a person, or an event or an issue. The principle character is a place. Here are some recommendations on how you might proceed. Do not depend on your recollections. Be sure to bring along a notebook in which to record your observations while in the field. Your field notes should include detailed observations of the site, as well as your reactions to it. It should also include sketches, maps and diagrams. These notes will help you write your paper. Taking pictures to include in your paper is also useful to illustrate what you are discussing. At each site, there will be abundant information as well as knowledgeable experts to answer your questions. The specific topics that you want to consider include:
**Location:** Where exactly is this site. Describe the location so that someone else would be able to find it.

**Setting:** Before entering the area, take a look around. Describe the landscape in which this site is situated.

**Weather:** Describe the weather on the day of your visit. Then consult a weather website such as www.wunderground.com to place this weather in the context of the conditions prevailing that day. How does it tie in with the general weather patterns for the region and for the season? (Chapters 5,6,7)

**Climate:** What is the climate of the region where the study site is situated? What is the microclimate of the study site? How do local conditions differ from the general characteristics for this climate type? (Chapter 8)

**Plant Communities:** Identify the principle plant communities to be found at your site. Describe the distinguishing characteristics of each community and the dominate plant species of each. What exotic (non-native) plant species are present and what effect do these plants have on the native communities? (Chapter 11)

**Soils:** Observe the soil of your study site. Pick some up in your hands. What can you tell us about its color and texture? Do soil conditions change as you walk through the site? How? (Chapter 12)

**Wildlife:** What wildlife still resides in your study area? Are there any endangered species present? What has been their impact on the natural ecology of the site? How has this ecosystem changed from what it was 100 years ago? (Chapter 11)

**Terrain:** Describe the specific terrain of your site. What landforms are present? What tectonic (Chapter 14) and gradational processes (Chapter 15, and 16, 18, 19 or 20) appear to be responsible for shaping the landscape? What material evidence can you find for these processes?

**Local History:** There is really no natural environment left in southern California that has not been touched somehow by human activity. What significant cultural and/or historic artifacts are present? A brief inquiry into the history of the locality will help you understand how this site came to be as you see it today. Myths and legends attached to a particular place can also reveal what earlier visitors saw in this place and the value the attached to it.

**Site Map:** An essential component of this assignment is a sketch map of the local landscape. At some point in your walk find a site that shows the relationship between plants and landforms. The exact size and scope of each site will vary, but can range from 50 to several hundred square yards. The map should show principal landforms, the patterns of vegetation, and location of any animal life if any. This sketch map should be neat, clean and clearly identify what is being represented. Your map should be on a 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper.
Field Observation Sites

Audubon Center at Debs Park – 4700 N. Griffin Avenue, Los Angeles. (323)221-2255 [www.audubon-ca.org/debs_park.htm](http://www.audubon-ca.org/debs_park.htm) Just 10 minutes north of the downtown skyscrapers lay the grassy hillsides of Ernest E. Debs Regional Park. Tucked in one corner of the park is the Audubon Center. Several natural communities are to be found here. The center offers guided hikes and a self guided nature trail as well as a variety of nature education activities for all ages. From the Pasadena Freeway (I-110) north exit at Avenue 43 and turn right. Make a left onto Griffin Avenue.

Bolsa Chica Wetlands – Pacific Coast Highway, Huntington Beach. (714) 897-7003. [www.amigosdebol-sachica.org](http://www.amigosdebol-sachica.org) The Bolsa Chica Wetlands ate the largest remaining coastal marsh lands in southern California encompassing over 1100 acres. These wetlands are inundated by both saltwater from the ocean and freshwater from rainfall and runoff. Bolsa Chica is an important stop on the Pacific flyway and is home to four endangered species and two threatened bird species. Docent led tours are scheduled for 9am on the first Saturday of each month. A self guided trail is available a other times, and there is an Interpretive Center at Warner Ave. and Pacific Coast Highway. From the San Diego Freeway (I-405) at the intersection with the Garden Grove Freeway (state hwy 22) exit onto Bolsa Chica Road and proceed south. Turn right on Warner Ave. and continue until you reach Pacific Coast Highway.

Eaton Canyon Nature Center – 1750 N. Altadena Drive, Pasadena. (818) 398-5420. A 184 acre natural park situated at the base of Mt. Wilson. Eaton Creek flows through the canyon during all but the summer months. Several natural habitat communities are represented here. The park offers a self guided nature trail and on Saturdays at 9am a guide led nature walk. There are 5 miles of nature trails including a wheelchair accessible trail. The nature center is open daily 9am to 5pm. From the Foothill Highway (I-210) in Pasadena, exit on Altadena Drive. Turn north on Altadena and continue to the Nature Center.

El Dorado Nature Center – 7550 E. Spring St. Long Beach (562) 570-1745. Tucked between the San Gabriel River and Coyote Creek several natural communities have been reconstructed in this 85 acre wildlife area. The nature center offers a self guided nature trail. There are 2 ¼ miles of trails including a handicapped accessible trail. There is also a small interpretive museum on site. The nature center is open until 4pm Tuesday through Sunday. From the San Diego Freeway (I-405) south take Studebaker Rd. north. Turn right on E. Spring Street. The El Dorado Nature Center will be on your right. The parking fee is $3 on weekdays and $5 on the weekends.

George F. Canyon Nature Center – 27305 Palos Verdes Drive East, Rolling Hills Estates. (310) 547-0862 [www.palosverdes.com/naturecenter](http://www.palosverdes.com/naturecenter). George F. Canyon inscribes the northeast slope of the Palos Verde Peninsula opposite the reservoir. The self guided nature trail (2 miles round trip) delivers you into one of the most pristine and beautiful of the peninsula’s many canyons. There is a docent led nature walk ($2 donation) on the first Saturday of every month at 10am. There is also a small interpretive center on site. From the Harbor Freeway (I-110) south take Pacific Coast Highway west. Turn left on Narbonne Avenue which shortly becomes Palos Verdes Drive East. The Nature Center is located on the corner of Palos Verdes Drive East and Palos Verdes Drive North.
**Madrona Marsh Preserve** – 3201 Plaza Del Amo, Torrance. (310) 782-3989 or (310) 32-MARSH. www.tprd.torrent.com/marsh.htm. Madrona Marsh is one of the last remnants of the extensive fresh water marsh system that covered much of the South Bay coastal plain. Now it is in the retail heart of Torrance, next to the Del Amo Fashion Center, one of the largest shopping malls on the continent. The preserve is open daily. On the fourth weekend of every month there is a guided nature walk at 9am on Saturday and 10am on Sunday. From Hawthorne Blvd. in Torrance turn east on Sepulveda Blvd. Turn north on Maple Ave and then left on Plaza Del Amo. From Hawthorne Blvd, the marsh is two blocks east behind the Target store.

**Monrovia Canyon Park** – 1200 N. Canyon Blvd, Monrovia (626) 256-8282 www.ci.monrovia.ca.us/city_hall/public_works/canyon_park/canyon_park.htm. This award winning wilderness park is situated in the San Gabriel Mountains ten minutes from the 210 Freeway at an elevation of 1300 feet. Year round springs feed a 30 foot waterfall and help provide a home for deer, bear, mountain lion and a myriad of other mammals, reptiles, birds and insects. Canyon trails lead through several plant communities: coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland and riparian. The Nature Center is open daily from 8am to 5pm except Tuesdays. Every Saturday at 1pm and on the first Sunday of each month at 1pm a guided hike is provided free of charge to the public. From the 210 freeway, exit Myrtle, drive through Old Town Monrovia to Foothill Blvd, turn right, go two lights to Canyon Blvd, turn left, drive through residential area for about 1 mile staying to the right, turn right into Canyon Park at the 3 foot high sign. There is a $5 parking fee.

**Placerita Canyon Nature Center** – 19152 Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall (661) 259-7721 www.placerita.org. This 350 acre park is located in an east-west running canyon featuring oak groves, chaparral-covered slopes and a sycamore-lined stream. Placerita is where gold was first discovered in 1842. The park offers a self guided nature walk and on Saturday at 11am, a guide led nature walk. There are 8 miles of hiking trails, one of which is accessible to wheelchairs. The natural history museum and live animal exhibits are open daily 9am to 5pm. Take the Golden State Freeway (I-5) north to State Highway 14 to the Placerita Canyon exit. Turn east and drive one and a half miles to the park entrance.

**San Dimas Canyon Nature Center** – 1628 N. Sycamore Canyon Road. San Dimas (909) 599-7512. The park is located between San Dimas and Sycamore Canyons on the border of the Angeles National Forest. Nature trails meander through more than 100 acres of chaparral covered foothills, oak woodland and riparian vegetation. This park also features a wildlife sanctuary for injured or non-releaseable native animals and a raptor rehabilitation flight cage. There is self guided nature trail and a natural history museum that is open 9am to 5pm daily. Take the Foothill Freeway (I-210) east, exit on San Dimas Ave. Turn right onto Foothill Blvd. Continue on Foothill until San Dimas Canyon Road then turn left. Continue until you reach the park it will be your second left.

**Whittier Narrows Nature Center** – 1000N. Durfee Ave. South El Monte (626)575-5523. Bordering the San Gabriel River, this 400 acre preserve if riparian woodlands features 4 lakes and many plants and animals found in a wetland community. The lakes provide a winter sanctuary for migrating waterfowl. There is a self guided nature walk available, on Saturdays there is either a guide led natural tour ($2 donation) or a birdwalk ($2 donation). There is also a wheelchair accessible trail. The Nature Center is open from 8am to 5pm Tuesday-Sunday. Take the Pomona Freeway (State Highway 60) east to the Peck Road exit. Turn right on Durfee Ave. The park entrance will be on your left.