

## Azalea Creek at The Cedars; The Blob and Mule Trail.

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Looking East up the Azalea Creek drainage, following the abandoned mule trail.

The Cedars, the massive "island" of ultramafic rock (=serpentine) in NW Sonoma Co. California is a large place. Further, the limited number of people who have had a chance to visit its amazing canyons, have generally only seen a small part of the place. Typically we tour people around our Main Canyon parcel where the trails we constructed make the formidable terrain accessible. Trails are unquestionably the easiest way to make the inaccessible, accessible, not to mention more enjoyable.

But for those who have visited before, our second favorite place to take them is Azalea Creek, the second largest drainage (watershed) within The Cedars. Azalea Creek has some exceptional features, including the largest calcium carbonate formation at The Cedars and some of the most ancient old-growth Sargent cypress woodland (*Hesperocyparis* ((=*Cupressus*)) *sargentii*.)



A view from across the canyon of The Blob, the largest calcium carbonate (travertine) feature at The Cedars. The creek runs diagonally across the picture but is hidden by the trees.



View toward the central portion of The Blob in late afternoon light.



In the center is a grotto like space, The Maw (sometimes called The Balcony), with its fanciful stalactite-edged hooded roof.

Another unique feature of Azalea Creek is the remains of a mule trail that accessed at least two mining areas in this watershed, this mining area being called the Yellow Streak Mine. The Yellow Streak Mine is one of three chromite mines in The Cedars, the other two being in the Main Canyon (and known as the Rattlesnake Mine and The Slats). But these later two mines had a road to take out the ore, and in East Austin Creek over the ridge, the magnesite mines there had a small gauge railroad to haul that out to civilization. But in Azalea Creek they used a mule, and carved a route through the rocky slopes and talus to get to and from these mines.

Here, looking W down Azalea Creek, an early stretch of the mule trail can be seen carved into the cliffside in the center. It then passes through a woodland and re-emerges near the base of the orange toned hillside, not far above the vegetation near the bottom, but is not distinct enough to see clearly in this image. About half way across this relatively flat area the trail split; one branch heading down to the creek ultimately, the other climbing up to the right where a stretch is visible to the right of, and near the top of, the tall tree in the right corner. An approximation of the trail route is drawn in fuchsia below.

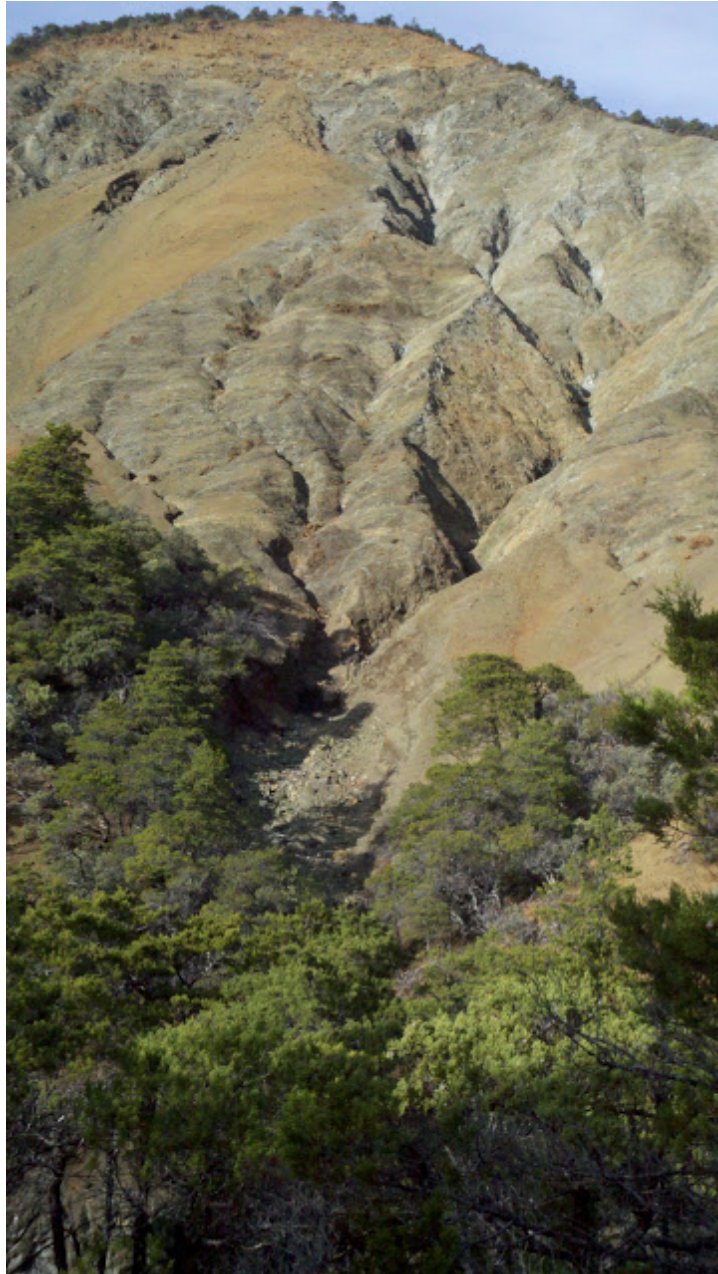




A stretch of the mule trail cut into rock; such areas tend to be the best preserved.



Here I am on the trail approaching the first of two mining areas. Photo by David McCrory.



An interrupted sloping line across the center horizon shows portions of the trail, but in the gully it is completely gone; thus this is as far as most can get, as the drop off is precipitous. To circumvent these washouts is very difficult and dangerous. This photo by David is from down in the creek, and for scale, you might be able to make me out in the gully where the upper gullies converge.



Ultimately the mule trail reached the upper canyons of Azalea Creek, which are deep and so narrow as to be very difficult to utilize for access. Thus the trail had to cut across some steep cliffs and talus slopes to get to the upper mining area, which would have been beyond the right edge of this picture.





In this closer view the trace of the trail can be seen as a shallow diagonal across the center horizon of this picture - going from the spine of the ridge on the left side to the woods on the right side. The cliffs to the left of the spine have become so eroded, the trail is not only impassable, but it is hard to even find any remnant.



As the trail continued up this canyon - the North Fork of Azalea Creek - it passed in and out of two wooded zones and then emerged (not visible here) from the center of the left side of this picture. It then heads over to, and above the strange rock outcrop with the large white spot and continues beyond at the base of the rocks with the marble-cake like coloration. These ochre colored bands are believed to be the 'yellow streaks" that gave the mine its name.



The terminus of the trail was this strange arcing cliff face about 12' high, with a shallow overhang, . This area is to the immediate right of the previous picture.

Looking W down Azalea Creek, Mohrhardt Ridge (not part of The Cedars) in the distance (bluish green). The two previous pictures would be to the right of this view (though not immediately so), but this view includes about 90% of the mule trail. The visible parts of the trail are drawn in fuchsia in the image below. The gaps in the center are where the trail is obliterated by erosion.



A picture drawn by a guest staying at the Berglund Ranch in 1948 (now Campbell Ranch) of A. L. Laton and his wife Wanda, riding home to Cazadero. Laton was the operator of the chromite mines at The Cedars. The mines were about 10 miles from Cazadero and even today in a car, it seems like a very long journey.