

Nature Detectives

Donner Lake State Park



We are Nature Detectives



Nature detectives, lets see what we can discover as we explore Donner Lake State Park!

What do nature detectives do?

- Look carefully for clues
- Record observations

Let's check out some plants & animals we may spot on our journey!

Animals of Donner Lake



California Sister Butterfly

California Sister Butterfly feeds on rotting fruit, sap, mud, and occasionally on the nectar from flowers.



Western Fence Lizard

Western Fence Lizards can often be seen sunning on surfaces such as rocks. Lizards are cold blooded, so need to warm up their muscles in preparation to hunt for food.



Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel

Commonly mistaken for chipmunks, this squirrel can be distinguished by the lack of stripes on its face.

Birds of Donner Lake



Steller's Jay

Steller's Jays are good mimics, and will imitate the calls of birds of prey to scare other birds away from a feeding area.



Osprey

Look for Osprey soaring over the water hunting for fish. Osprey can spot their prey from 30-130' above, and dive feet first into the water to catch fish with incredible accuracy.



Mountain Chickadee

Listen for their call 'cheeseburger'!
Mountain Chickadees primarily eat insects and seeds.

Plants of Donner Lake



Thimbleberry

Thimbleberries have large green leaves, white flowers in the spring & early summer, and produce small berries that look similar to raspberries. They are enjoyed by the local wildlife!



Sticky Cinquefoil

Cinque means five in Italian, these small yellow flowers have 5 petals. The sticky cinquefoil has many hairs on the long stems supporting the flowers.



Greenleaf Manzanita

Greenleaf manzanita has red-brown branches, and bright green leaves. In the spring it has light pink lantern shaped blossoms, then small berries. Native Americans made cider from the berries of greenleaf manzanita.

Plants of Donner Lake



White Fir

Grey Bark

Flat needles which do not grow from the underside of twigs. Needles are 1.5-2.5" long.



Jeffrey Pine

Brown bark that smells like vanilla

Round needles in bundles of 3. Needles are 5-10" long.



Nature Detective Journal

In your detective journal today, you will record what you discover with both drawings & written descriptions.



WOLF LICHEN - *LETHARIA VULPINA*

DONNERLAKE - CHINA COVE

JUNE 17, 2021 2:30-4:30 pm
90°F SUNNY, BREEZE

IT IS A WARM, SUNNY DAY AT DONNER LAKE. THE WIND IS CAUSING SMALL WAVES ALONG THE BEACH. I NOTICE THAT AT THE FAR END OF THE BEACH THE WATER IS COVERED WITH BRIGHT GREEN PINE POLLEN. IT IS A SIMILAR COLOR TO THE BRIGHT GREEN WOLF LICHEN THAT GROW ON SOME TREES.

I LOOK CLOSELY AT THE WOLF LICHEN ON A NEARBY TREE. IT HAS MANY INTERTWINED "BRANCHES" THAT SPLIT IN TWO. THE TREE THAT SPLIT IN TWO IS A JEFFREY PINE - IT SMELLS SWEET, LIKE VANILLA. AT THE BASE OF ANOTHER JEFFREY PINE I SEE A GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL. THE SQUIRREL HAS TAN FUR, WITH A WHITE STRIPE AND TWO BLACK STRIPES ON EACH SIDE. IT DOES NOT HAVE STRIPES ON ITS FACE. IT HUNCHES BETWEEN TWO ROOTS OF THE TREE, HOLDING BETWEEN ITS TWO FRONT PAWS, TO EAT. IT LOOKS AROUND BETWEEN BITES. PERHAPS IT IS LOOKING FOR DANGER? I WONDER - WHAT ANIMAL SEES A GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL AS PREY?



STICKY CINQUEFOL - *POTENTILLA GLANDULOSA*



GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL
SPERMOPHILUS LATERALIS



Nature Detective Journal

What do you include in your detective's journal?

Where are you?

What day & time is it?

What do you notice?

What do you hear?

What do you wonder about?

The image shows a blank template for a 'Nature Detective Journal'. The template is divided into several sections by thin black lines:

- Details:** A rectangular box at the top left.
- Written Observations:** A larger rectangular box below 'Details' containing the text: 'Written Observations', 'Where:', 'When:', and 'What do you notice:'.
- Big Picture Landscape:** A large rectangular box on the right side.
- Plant:** A rectangular box at the bottom left, below 'Written Observations'.
- Animal:** A rectangular box at the bottom right, below 'Big Picture Landscape'.
- Detective Journal Observations made by:** A rectangular box at the bottom center, below 'Written Observations'.

Nature Detective Journal



Big Picture Landscape

This space is used to draw the scene & to give the overall impression of where we are. This drawing may show mountains, lake, trees, bushes. It helps to hold up your hands to look through, as if your hands are a picture frame. This helps narrow down an area of the landscape to decide what to draw.

We don't need to draw everything we see!

Nature detective journal

Draw one animal you see.

Sit quietly, and see how long you can observe an animal without disturbing it. What is it doing? What noise does it make? Does it have fur, feathers, scales?

Don't see any animals? Do you hear one? What does it sound like? Do you see signs of animals such as spider webs, scat, nibbled pinecones or leaves?



Nature Detective Journal



Draw one plant you see.

What can help you identify it? Does it have flowers, pine cones, berries?

Notice the leaf placement. What is the texture and color of the leaf, stem, bark?

Are any animals on this plant? If so, what is that animal doing?

Nature Detective Journal



Investigate something very closely. Study all the secret details of a plant, a bug, a rock, whatever catches your interest and doesn't move too quickly!



Nature Detective Journal

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In the written observations area write what you notice about the area.

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

What animals do you see? What are they doing?

What plants do you notice?

Let's go Investigate Donner Lake!



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