Covid-19 Escapes for Plant Lovers
...Making the Best of a Lockdown
by Paul Gipe

We’ve been in various stages of COVID-19 lockdowns for nine months now. We miss our friends, our colleagues, and our get-togethers. Our solution to keep from going stir-crazy has been a weekly Covid Escape.

Those who follow me on Facebook or LinkedIn know of our escapades. Yes, we flee the lockdown and take a hike somewhere within two or three hours of Bakersfield. It’s been good for our sanity and we’ve seen a lot of lovely country that we were always too busy to visit before.

Our Covid Escapes are bit more challenging than most because we drive an electric car. So if we can do it, those of you in a “gasser” should have no problems.

The farthest we’ve ventured was Horseshoe Meadows, some 180 miles away, where we botanized at 10,000 feet and Nancy found gentian flowering in late October.

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While campgrounds and visitor centers are closed, most trails are open for socially-distanced hiking. Check before you go. Officially, state parks “recog-
nize that mental health is physical health. As such, day use outdoor areas of park units currently open to the public will remain open” during the lockdown.

In the process of heading out on our Covid-19 “day off” we’ve found new locales for future CNPS field trips, such as the Chimeneas Ecological Reserve off of Hwy 166 near New Cuyama and Aliso Canyon Road nearby. Even in December we’ve found flowering plants. On a hike from Red Cliffs Natural Area in Red Rock Canyon SP to Nightmare Gulch we found a sturdy tarweed brightening up the trail. Elsewhere we’ve stumbled across sturdy wire lettuce in bloom. Bladderpod is another winter bloomer that you can find almost anywhere.

And even when they’re not in bloom, some plants are distinctive enough after they’ve gone to seed that they’re easy for a novice to identify. On the Tule Elk Trail at Wind Wolves Preserve it’s not hard to spot the dried stalks of solitary milkweed poking up through the vast fields of non-native grasses.

Don’t overlook the trees and shrubs that liven up our landscape. Hike through the Joshua tree forest at Saddleback Butte SP or see the mesquite at Mesquite Springs on the Red Rock-Randsburg Road.

We’re fortunate to live in a place where there’s so much to see such a short distance away. Get out. Explore. ✨