Discover Wildcat Canyon

Year opened: 1936
Acres: 2,789
Highlights: Hiking, biking, horseback riding, picnicking, surviving structures from Civilian Conservation Corps work projects completed in the 1930s.

Did you know? This park originally included today’s Tilden Regional Park, which was split off in 1937 and renamed in honor of Charles Lee Tilden, the Park District’s first general manager.

Fees: There are no fees at Wildcat Canyon.

HISTORY
Today’s Wildcat Canyon Regional Park is likely located entirely within the homeland of the Huchiun, an Ohlone tribe whose members spoke the Karkin language. The Huchiun thrived for generations in a region that extended from today’s Temescal Creek, north to at least the lower San Pablo and Wildcat Creek drainages. They used land management techniques that caused the plant materials and the shellfish they harvested, and the other animals they netted, trapped, snared, and variously hunted, to occur in larger and healthier populations than if they never used them. The 1772 and 1776 arrival of Spanish expeditions signaled a time of severe disruption, dislocation, and upheaval. Despite these changes, today’s Ohlones are bringing ancestral cultural traditions forward into the future.

By 1840 most East Bay land had been parcelled out in land grants, and Juan Jose and Victor Castro were awarded all vacant lands between the already established ranchos. The Castros kept a small portion, and speculators shared the rest with a water company and the township of Orinda. At this time the streams and springs shared the rest with a water company and the town.

GEOLOGY AND WILDLIFE
The hills and valleys in Wildcat Canyon are marked by squatters’ struggles and water wars. Old and fresh landslides and slumps are numerous. Springs and ponds are common. Small earthquake faults have left their traces. Large coast live oaks, bay laurels, and a scattering of bigleaf maples and madrones grow on east-facing slopes. North-facing hillsides support nearly pure stands of bay laurel fringed with coast live oak. Moist chaparral of coyote brush, poison oak, elderberry, snowberry, bracken fern, and blackberry grow high on north-facing slopes.

A riparian forest of alder, willow, creek dogwood, and bay laurel grows in the gorge of bedrock-cutting Wildcat Creek. The west- and south-facing canyon slopes are covered with introduced annual grasses (oat, rye, barley, etc.). A few stands of native bunch grasses persist. The re are many native wildflower species competing with introduced plants as poison hemlock, mustard, radish, and carrot thistle.

Foxes, raccoons, skunks, and opossums range nightly through the canyon. Deer, ground squirrels, and voles forage by day. Gopher snakes, king snakes, and western racers inhabit the fields and meadows; garter snakes hunt the ponds and stream verges. Rubber boa and ringneck snakes inhabit the forest. Redtail hawks, American kestrels, starphinned and Cooper’s hawks, and turkey vultures soar aloft. Great horned owls inhabit the night. There are also many varieties of songbirds. Remember: please do not take animal or plant life, as all such resources are protected for the enjoyment of everyone.

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