

Discover Black Diamond

INDIANS have lived in the greater Bay Area for thousands of years. Black Diamond was located in the backcountry between three tribes: Chupcan (Concord), Volvon (Clayton) and Ompin (Pittsburg). All three nations spoke the Bay Miwok language. With the arrival of Spanish, Mexican, and American settlers after 1772, the Bay Miwok way of life was rapidly transformed. However, in spite of pressure to the contrary, many California Indians still practice the traditions of their ancestors.

COAL MINING From the 1850s to the early 1900s, five coal mining towns thrived in the Black Diamond area: Nortonville, Somersville, Stewartville, West Hartley, and Judsonville. As the location of California's largest coal mining operation, nearly four million tons of coal ("black diamonds") were removed from the earth. People from all over the world were drawn to the area's five mining towns, and their lives were characterized by hard work and long hours. As many as 900 miners, some as young as eight years old, labored in hundreds of miles of underground workings. At the peak of operations, the coalfield was reported to have been the population center of Contra Costa County.

The coal mines had a significant impact on California's economy. By the time operations ceased due to rising production costs and the exploitation of new energy sources, much of California's economy had been transformed from a rural to an industrial base.

SAND MINING In the 1920s underground sand mining began near the deserted Nortonville and Somersville townsites. The Somersville mine supplied sand used in glass production by the Hazel-Atlas Glass Company in Oakland, while the Nortonville mine supplied the Columbia Steel Works in Pittsburg with foundry (casting) sand. Competition from Belgian glass sand and the closing of the steel foundry ended the sand mining by the late 1940s. Altogether, more than 1.8 million tons of sand had been mined.

RANCHING Until the discovery of coal, cattle ranching was the major industry in this area. After the mines closed, some miners found a new career in ranching. Abandoned mining town buildings became barns, railroad ties were used as fence posts, and boilers were converted into water troughs. Descendants of original mining families still graze cattle in the Preserve.

POLICE, FIRE, MEDICAL EMERGENCY9-1-1
EBRPD HEADQUARTERS 1-888-EBPARKS
PARK OFFICE 1-888-EBPARKS, option 3, ext. 4506
TDD(510) 633-0460

A REGIONAL PRESERVE The East Bay Regional Park District began acquiring land for Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve in the early 1970s. Today, most of the mining district is within the Preserve's nearly 5,315 acres. The area is an ideal location for hiking and picnicking. Naturalists conduct a variety of programs related to the Preserve's natural and historic resources. For more information, call 1-888-EBPARKS, option 3, ext. 4506.

VEGETATION The Preserve's 65 miles of trails traverse areas of grassland, foothill woodland, mixed evergreen forest, chaparral, stream vegetation, and exotic plantings. Notable among the latter are several tree species introduced by the coal miners, including black locust, pepper tree, almond, eucalyptus, and tree of heaven.

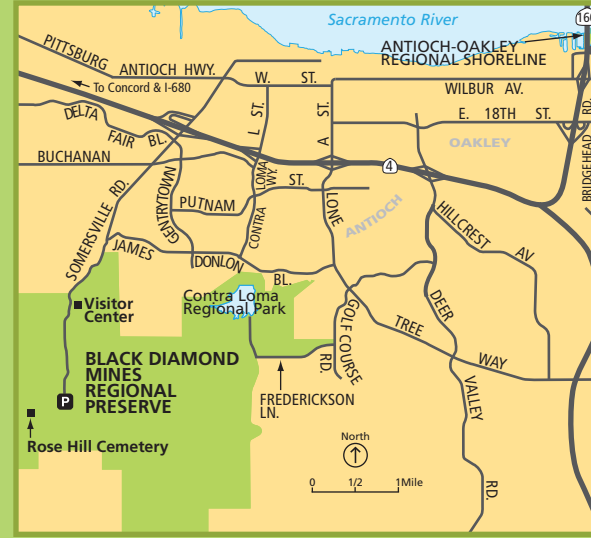
Black Diamond is noted as the northernmost location of Coulter pine, black sage, desert olive, and dudleya. In addition, several species that are restricted to the Mount Diablo area occur here, including the Mt. Diablo globe lily, Mt. Diablo helianthella, and Mt. Diablo manzanita. In the springtime, the hills are covered with some of the most remarkable wildflower displays in the Bay Area.

WILDLIFE The Preserve supports a healthy wildlife population, and it is not uncommon for the observant hiker to see the tracks of raccoons, skunks, opossums, rabbits, and deer. Mountain lions, bobcats, foxes, and coyotes are occasionally spotted, while birds of prey soar overhead. Over 100 species of birds have been seen, from the rare golden eagle to the ever-present meadowlark.

The side-blotched lizard has its northern limit in the Preserve, and several rare animal species have been found here: the white-tailed kite, the Alameda striped racer, the red-legged frog, and the California tiger salamander.

ROSE HILL CEMETERY Although little remains of the coal mining communities themselves, a historic cemetery serves as a monument to the lives of the former residents. Buried here are children who died in epidemics, women who died in childbirth, and men who died in mining disasters. Although more than 10 nationalities resided in the mining area, Rose Hill was a Protestant cemetery that served as the burial ground for many of the Welsh residents.

WON'T YOU HELP US? Over the years, vandalism has taken its toll on the cemetery, which the Park District is attempting to restore. If you have information concerning people buried here or the location of missing gravestones, please call the Black Diamond office at 1-888-EBPARKS, option 3, ext. 4506.



To Reach Black Diamond:

Take Highway 4 to the Somersville Road exit in Antioch. Drive south on Somersville Road to the Preserve entrance.

If you would like this information in an alternative format, please contact the EBRPD Public Affairs Department at (510) 544-2200, fax (510) 635-3478, TDD (510) 633-0460, or info@ebparks.org.

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve

East Bay Regional Park District



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