

DISCOVER WILDCAT CANYON

HISTORY On a spring day in 1772 Pedro Fages, Fray Juan Crespi and a “small band of six Catalonian volunteers” entered a Native American village located near the mouth of Wildcat Creek. Although their search for a trade route north had been frustrated by the broad, swift waters of the Carquinez Straits, they found the native people to be welcoming. Fages traded glass beads for food and tools. In his diary he refers to his hosts as “peaceful heathen.” These Native Americans did not practice agriculture since they were able to identify and gather a great variety of edible and medicinal plants. They hunted deer and elk and took fish, clams, mussels and oysters from the Bay.

When the Spanish adventurers opened the route along the east side of San Francisco Bay, they also opened the way for the missions and ranchos. Cattle, horses and sheep, fenced and cultivated fields and a new religion were in lethal conflict with the native religion and the centuries-old practice of hunting and gathering on communal lands.

By 1840 most East Bay land had been parceled out in land grants. In 1841 the Spanish king awarded Juan Jose and Victor Castro all vacant land 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 Wildcat Canyon, with its streams and springs, became the focus in a new struggle, this time over water rights. It wasn't until the mid 1920s, when the East Bay Municipal Utility District brought Mokelumne River water to the East Bay, that the “water wars” came to an end.

In 1935 the East Bay Regional Park District acquired the southern part of Wildcat Canyon to create Charles Lee Tilden Regional Park. In 1952 the northern part was sold by EBMUD to private interests. Standard Oil drilled exploratory wells there in 1966, but the results did not justify further drilling. In 1967 the Park District bought an initial 400 acres, and by 1976 the District owned enough land to form the 2,197-acre Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. The park's acreage now stands at 2,440.

ALVARADO PARK At the north end of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park is its Alvarado section. This area began as a private park in 1909, and was taken over by the City of Richmond in 1923. It remained a city park until 1985, when it was transferred to the East Bay Regional Park District to become part of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park.

The original facilities at Alvarado Park included an open-air pavilion and dance platform, later converted to a roller rink. These are now gone, but extensive masonry work, retaining walls, a stone bridge and stone light standards remain.

Alvarado Park is considered to be a unique variation on the National Park Service style of “rustic park architecture.” Its stone masonry was constructed during Richmond's ownership through various Depression-era work programs. Because of these unique features, Alvarado is included in the National Registry of Historic Places.

The Park District has replaced Alvarado's old playground equipment with attractive new play structures. A former central cement parking area has been planted with grass, and several dilapidated structures have been removed. Also under way is a carefully designed project to restore Wildcat Creek to a more natural state, which will allow reintroduction of fish into the stream.

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 leave their traces. The soils are mostly clay with some bands of gravel and rock. On east-facing slopes grow large coast live oaks, bay laurels and a scattering of bigleaf maples and madrones. North-facing hillsides support some beautiful, 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.

In the gorge of bedrock-cutting Wildcat Creek grows a riparian forest of alder, willow, creek dogwood and bay laurel. The forest extends the length of Wildcat Creek and partway up the tributaries. 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. There are many native wildflower species vying for growing room with such introduced plants as poison hemlock, mustard, radish and an advancing army of cardoon thistle.

Foxes, raccoons, skunks and opossums range nightly through the canyon. Deer, ground squirrels and voles forage more commonly by day. Gopher snakes, king snakes and western racers inhabit the fields and meadows; garter snakes hunt the ponds and stream verges. In the forest are rubber boas and ringneck snakes. Aloft are redtail hawks, American kestrels, sharpshinned and Cooper's hawks and turkey vultures. Most nights you can hoot up a great horned owl. There are also many varieties of songbirds. Remember: please take neither animal nor plant life, as all such resources are protected for the enjoyment of everyone.

BUS TO THE PARK: AC Transit line #70 runs to Arlington and McBryde, with a short walk to Wildcat's Alvarado area. Line # 74 runs to San Pablo Dam Road and Clark Road with a short walk to the Clark-Boas Trail. To access Wildcat Creek Trail from Tilden Nature Area, take line #67 to Grizzly Peak Blvd. and Spruce St. daily and into Tilden Nature Area on weekends. To confirm bus schedules call AC Transit at 817-1717.



East Bay Regional Park District
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Alameda Creek Quarries Regional Recreation Area
Alameda Creek Regional Trail
Antioch Regional Shoreline
Ardenwood Regional Preserve
Bishop Ranch Regional Open Space
Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve
Black Diamond-to-Mt. Diablo Trail
Briones Regional Park
Briones-to-Las Trampas Regional Trail
Briones-to-Mt. Diablo Regional Trail
Brooks Island Regional Shoreline
Browns Island Regional Shoreline
California Hiking and Riding Trail
Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline
Chabot Regional Park
Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve
Contra Costa Canal Regional Trail
Contra Loma Regional Park
Coyote Hills Regional Park
Crown Memorial State Beach
Cull Canyon Regional Recreation Area
Del Valle Regional Park
Diablo Foothills Regional Park/Castle Rock Regional Recreation Area
Don Castro Regional Recreation Area
Dry Creek Pioneer Regional Park
East Bay Skyline National Recreation Trail
Garin Regional Park
Hayward Regional Shoreline
Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve
Kennedy Grove Regional Recreation Area
Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail
Las Trampas Regional Wilderness/Little Hills Regional Recreation Area
Las Trampas-to-Mt. Diablo Regional Trail
Leona Heights Regional Open Space
Martin Luther King, Jr., Regional Shoreline
Martinez Regional Shoreline
Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline
Mission Peak Regional Preserve
Morgan Territory Regional Preserve
Ohlone Wilderness Regional Trail
Ohlone Regional Wilderness
Old Moraga Ranch Regional Trail
Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline
Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park
Point Isabel Regional Shoreline
Point Pinole Regional Shoreline
Redwood-to-Las Trampas Regional Trail
Redwood Regional Park/Roberts Regional Recreation Area
Round Valley Regional Park
San Pablo Bay Regional Shoreline
San Ramon Valley Iron Horse Regional Trail
Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area
Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve
Sobrante Ridge Regional Preserve
Sunol Regional Wilderness
Tassajara Creek Regional Park
Temescal Regional Recreation Area
Tilden Regional Park
Tilden-to-Briones Regional Trail
Wildcat Canyon Regional Park

WILDCAT CANYON REGIONAL PARK



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EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT