

A Slice of Time

Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve is an ecological jewel. The native plant community found here is seen nowhere else in the East Bay. It represents a relic plant association found only in certain areas in California where ideal soil and climatic conditions exist. You are within the boundaries of an island in time . . . what's left of a time gone by.

The vegetation association of Huckleberry Preserve finds its roots in past climates and geologic history. The plants originated in the distant past along the southern coast of California when the climate was more moist and tempered by the cool coastal fog. Today, similar vegetation is found on the islands off the Santa Barbara coast and in isolated pockets on the mainland coast from Point Conception to Montara Mountain south of San Francisco.

Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve has a year-round display of blossoming plants, many rare to the East Bay. As you stroll through the 240-acre preserve, stop periodically and reflect on your sense of place, for here you can experience an ancient slice of time.

THE HUCKLEBERRY PATH, a 1.7-mile loop, traverses a wide variety of terrain and is maintained to minimum requirements. From the parking lot, follow the path to the left fork, descend steeply and contour through a mature bay forest for about one mile. A steep ascent to the botanically rich upper trail will begin your 0.8-mile return to the parking lot. Allow two hours. Carry water. If you require a less strenuous trail, begin on the right fork and return before its descent into the bay forest.

The narrow, winding Huckleberry Path is our route through perhaps the most unique and diverse plant life of the entire East Bay. A leisurely stroll down this trail will allow you to explore the heartland of the preserve. Along the way, many plants that you encounter are usually confined to the immediate north coast region. Notable here are the dense, nearly impenetrable thickets of shrubby chaparral, including species such as coast huckleberry, coast siltkassel, and chinquapin.

The unusual geology of the Preserve, belonging to the Claremont shale/chert formation, owes its origin to the stratified skeletal, siliceous remains of microscopic diatoms and radiolaria, interspersed with thin bands of shale. This formation was originally laid down in a deep

ocean basin, solidified and later uplifted and exposed to erosion probably since the late Miocene epoch about 12 million years ago. Today it is exposed as hard, brittle bands of interbedded chert and shale.

Besides the extremely poor water holding capacity of this soil due to its deeply fractured and gravelly texture, the nutrient values are quite low relative to other soils locally. This unusual edaphic (soil-influenced) condition favors pioneering chaparral species that can tolerate the resulting harshness and colonize the most sterile, rocky knolls, and somewhat precludes the immediate intrusion of other local species.

On the most barren "rises" or rocky knolls, brittleleaf manzanita and pallid manzanita dominate the scene with their "elfin forest" character. These manzanitas, particularly the former, are the true shrubby pioneers of these knolls, and actually require these barren sites for their continued health and survival.

The Preserve's location due east of the Golden Gate, with resulting exposure to winter rain and frequent summer fog, results in cool, moist conditions which thus prevail act to accelerate and aid in natural succession in which plant species thrive for a time but are gradually replaced by other species. In this way, the manzanitas eventually surrender and succumb to other species such as huckleberry, siltkassel, and chinquapin.

All this time, and in the absence of fire, leaf and branch litter is deposited in great quantities, soil development becomes richer and deeper, and each succeeding species' leaf canopy continues to develop upward, eventually shading over and killing the previous species. Over a long period of time, this successional development will inevitably progress toward oak/bay forest, in which bay laurels and live oaks gradually move into the chaparral areas to shade out the chamise and manzanitas. This "plant succession" is a natural part of the evolution of California's landscape.

In the past, fire played an important role in maintaining the early, pioneer stages of this successional process. A morphological adaptation to fire may be witnessed by observing that many of these "pioneering" chaparral species possess swollen basal trunks, or burls, from which new healthy shoots sprout prolifically and develop into maturity again in the years following a fire. Other species of this chaparral community will re-seed themselves in the freshly opened burn sites. This early pioneer plant succession will develop toward maturity, and the whole process of species replacement will continue until fire returns.

However, the unusual edaphics of this shale/chert condition will greatly slow this successional process. Just how long it takes for the early stages of its succession to develop into the latent stages, no one knows for sure. These early successional stages, or the presence of these unique chaparral species, are the basis for the Preserve.

A most unusual feature of the Preserve is the year-round display of plants in bloom. The very rare pallid manzanita is clothed in clusters of small, white- to rose-tinged, urn-shaped flowers as early as November. Coast siltkassel is fully adorned with long, draping silky catkins in late December. The rare western leatherwood dangles golden blooms in early January, and the pink-flowering currant displays hanging, pink blooms somewhat later. One cannot afford to miss the profusion of creamy-white and pinkish floral sprays of creambush from May through July, or miss being tempted by the ripening thimbleberries. The bush monkey flower, rampant with orange, funnel-shaped blossoms, contrasts against the silvery-gray foliage and sky blue blossoms of the silver bush lupine. In late summer and fall, huckleberries ripen and mourning doves feeding hoggishly on the red-berryed clusters of the Pacific madrone. This is precisely when one should indulge in the fall leaf color and berry-ripening of this shrubby paradise.

As winter approaches, the bare twigs of deciduous shrubs emerge with hints of new life as young leaves unravel and silken catkins glisten in the morning dew. There is an endless array of color and form in leaves, twigs, flowers, and fruits year-round along the Huckleberry Path.

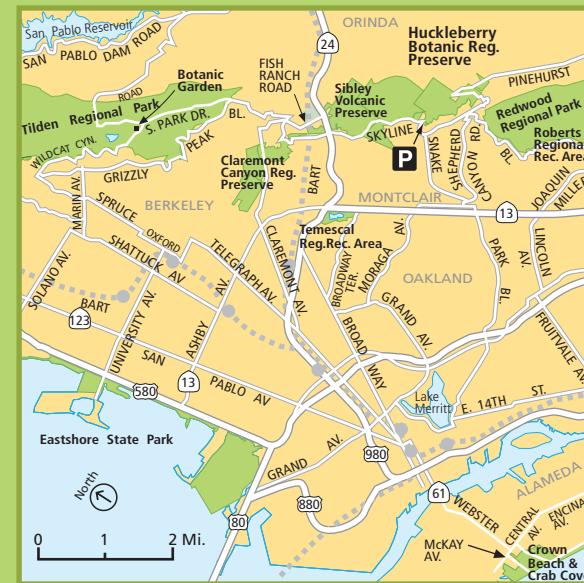
STOPS ALONG THE HUCKLEBERRY PATH

See map on reverse.

1. Pacific madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*)—The smooth, reddish bark (flaky-barked with age) and the evergreen, spreading leaf canopy makes madrone somewhat resemble a tree-like manzanita. Bears heavy clusters of dark red to orangish-red berries in fall and winter; a delicacy for mourning doves. Madrone also develops basal burls.



2. California hazelnut (*Corylus californica*)—Characterized by multiple trunks, felty leaves and showy male catkins. Hard nutlets inside vase-shaped, papery fruits are sweet and edible. Related to market filberts.



To Reach Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve: From Highway 24 in Oakland, take the Fish Ranch Road exit just east of the Caldecott Tunnel. Continue .8 miles to Grizzly Peak Blvd. Turn left and go 2.4 miles on Grizzly Peak to Skyline Boulevard. Turn left and drive approximately one-half mile to the park entrance on the left, past Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve. **Public Transit:** AC Transit #61 runs weekdays from MacArthur BART to Moraga Avenue and Medau Place in Montclair. AC Transit #18 runs weekdays from Berkeley BART to Mountain Boulevard and Moraga Avenue in Montclair. AC Transit Line V runs weekdays from the San Francisco Transbay Terminal to Moraga Avenue and Medau Place in Montclair. All these methods will require an approximately 2.25-mile, mostly uphill walk along Snake Road and Skyline Boulevard to reach the park entrance. Call AC Transit to confirm transit information: dial 511 (TDD/TTY: 1-800-448-9790) or see www.511.org.

PLEASE LET US KNOW how this map may be improved to help you use this park. Write, email, or call with your suggestions: 2950 Peralta Oaks Court, Oakland, CA 94605; info@ebparks.org; (510) 544-2210.



East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court,
P.O. Box 5381
Oakland, CA 94605-0381
1-888-EBPARKS ebparks.org
Rev. 3/11

Huckleberry

Botanic Regional Preserve

East Bay Regional Park District



Photo by Jerry Ting



POLICE, FIRE, MEDICAL EMERGENCY9-1-1
EBRPD HEADQUARTERS 1-888-EBPARKS
PARK OFFICE..... 1-888-327-2757, option 3, ext. 4532
WEB SITE..... www.ebparks.org
TDD(510) 633-0460