

# 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 Strait, 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 gathered a great variety of edible and medicinal plants, 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 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; Juan Jose and Victor Castro were awarded 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. 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 2,429.

**ALVARADO PARK** is at the north end of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. 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. For information on the reservable picnic areas in Alvarado, call 1-888-EBPARKS, option 2, then 1.

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

**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. Large coast live oaks, bay laurels, and a scattering of bigleaf maples and madrones grow on east-facing slopes. North-facing hill-sides 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 by day. Gopher snakes, king snakes, and western racers inhabit the fields and meadows; garter snakes hunt the ponds and stream verges. Rubber boas and ringneck snakes inhabit the forest. Redtail hawks, American kestrels, sharpshinned and Cooper's hawks, and turkey vultures soar aloft. Great horned owls inhabit the night. There are also many varieties of songbirds. Remember.

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](mailto:info@ebparks.org).



**To Alvarado Park and the Wildcat Canyon Staging Area:** From El Cerrito, take I-80 east to Richmond and exit at Solano Avenue. Turn left at the bottom of the off ramp onto Amador. Continue on Amador, turn right on McBryde, and continue to the first stop sign. The entrance to Alvarado Park is on the left. Park on the street and walk across and into Alvarado. For the staging area and trail access, continue straight, through the stop sign, onto Park Ave. The Wildcat Canyon staging area is approximately 1/4 mile ahead. From North Richmond and Pinole, take I-80 west to the McBryde exit. At the bottom of the ramp, turn left and follow McBryde to the second stop sign. The entrance to Alvarado Park is ahead on the left. Follow the directions above to reach the Wildcat Canyon staging area.

**Bus To The Park:** AC Transit #74 runs to San Pablo Dam Road and Clark Road with a short walk to the Clark-Boas Trail. Line #67 goes to Grizzly Peak Blvd. and Spruce St. daily and into Tilden Nature Area on weekends. AC Transit: 511 or 817-1717; TDD/TTY: (800) 448-9790; ParaTransit: (510) 287-5000.

# Wildcat Canyon Regional Park

East Bay Regional Park District



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**PARK OFFICE** ..... 1-888-EBPARKS,  
 ..... option 3, ext. 4567  
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**East Bay Regional Park District**  
 2950 Peralta Oaks Court,  
 P.O. Box 5381  
 Oakland, CA 94605-0381  
 1-888-EBPARKS [www.ebparks.org](http://www.ebparks.org)  
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