Claremont Canyon

Year opened: 1985  Acres: 208
Highlights: Hiking, horseback riding, connections with UC Berkeley trails, good views west to San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge.
Did you know? Claremont Canyon was known for a time as Telegraph Canyon because in 1858 it became the route for the first transcontinental telegraph.

Fees: there are no fees at Claremont Canyon.

HISTORY

Today’s Claremont Canyon is located within the homeland of the Huchiun, an Ohlone-speaking tribe whose members managed the landscape in a way that increased the numbers and health of its plants and animals, and whose lands included the bayshore outlet of Temescal Creek. Through Claremont Canyon, the Huchiun could travel east to the homeland of the Saclan, a Bay Miwok-speaking tribe.

Although today’s Claremont Canyon was a part of the Rancho San Antonio Spanish land grant of 1820, the first recorded modern development in the canyon was by American settlers as an important communication and transportation route, along the well-worn trails of the Huchiun. In 1858 a transcontinental telegraph line was strung through Claremont Canyon, and the canyon became the main “highway” for horse and wagon traffic between Oakland and Contra Costa County. In the early 1860s, Pony Express riders carried mail along this route. Travel through the canyon declined after 1903 with the opening of the Kennedy Tunnel, which preceded today’s Caldecott Tunnel.

In the early 20th century, Claremont Canyon was used for cattle grazing, dairying, minor quarrying, the development of springs, and for eucalyptus plantations. Despite the changes of history, for today’s Ohlones and Bay Miwoks and others, the region’s hills and valleys continue to link the past with the present.

Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve was conceived in the 1970s through community activism to preserve the Claremont Canyon watershed. In 1970 the Park District purchased a 64-acre parcel covering the outlet of Temescal Creek, which eventually drains into San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge.

In 1972 the Park District acquired land eastward from many individual landowners, the legacy of land subdivision “paper lots” sold door-to-door or by mail in the 1910s and ‘20s. In 1982 the Park District purchased a 64-acre parcel covering most of Gwin Canyon, which completed the preserve.

The 0.75-mile climb from Stonewall Road to the ridge top is steep, but hikers are rewarded with a panoramic view of Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco Bay, and the Golden Gate Bridge. The trail continues east along the ridge, straddling the boundary with University of California property and connecting with the University’s Ecological Study Area trail system.

Gwin Canyon Trail is a scenic, single-track trail located south of Claremont Avenue. It descends from the north end of Norfolk Road and ends 0.7 miles from the trailhead, just above Claremont Creek. In Gwin Canyon an array of native vegetation provides excellent habitat for wildlife.

The preserve is part of an ecological corridor on an urban fringe. In addition to the Park District landholdings, other undeveloped portions in the upper canyon are managed by the University of California and the East Bay Municipal Utility District. The City of Oakland owns Garber Park, a 13-acre oak/bay woodland south of Claremont Avenue.

The Claremont Canyon watershed is a mosaic of vegetation types – grasslands, coastal scrub, oak/bay woodland, and eucalyptus plantations – that supports a variety of animal and plant species. Commonly seen residents include black-tailed deer, coyote, gray fox, red-tailed hawk, and western terrestrial garter snake. A 1.5-mile section of Creek, known as Harwood Creek, flows through the center of the canyon. It is one of the three main tributaries of Temescal Creek, which eventually drains into San Francisco Bay in Emeryville.

Wildfires have been a concern for residents near Claremont Canyon. In the last century, four major wildfires have spread through the canyon, including the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire. Efforts currently underway to provide protection from wildfire include creating roadside fuel breaks and reducing non-native vegetation.

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