

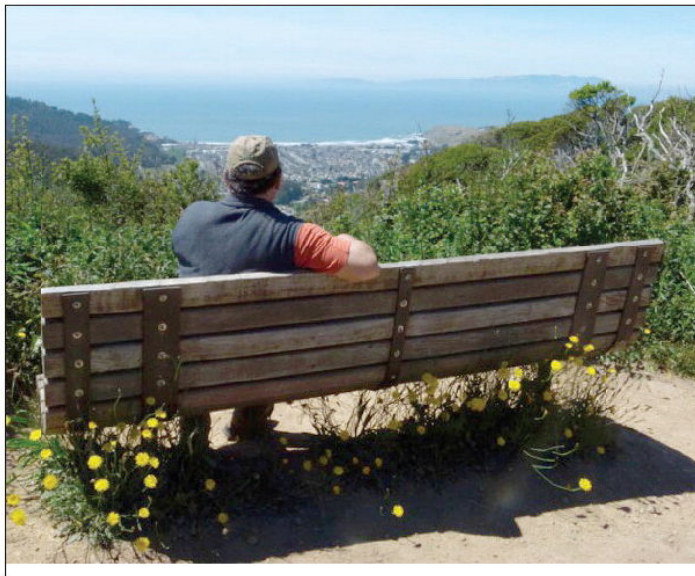
Get your summer hiking, enjoy nature and learn something new at hidden Pacifica gem

By Jane Northrop
Staff Writer

San Pedro Valley County Park, set in the back of Pacifica off Oddstad Boulevard, offers many ways to enjoy nature and stay healthy.

Trails from easy to hard let park goers learn close up the many habitats and wildlife in the park. Picnic areas are perfect for gathering a few friends together or a big group, such as a milestone birthday. The volunteer organization Friends of San Pedro Valley County Park run many programs out of the visitor center. Those programs are educational on a wide variety of topics from learning more about wildlife to sea level rise. The programs are featured in the Pacifica Tribune and on the website for the Friends of San Pedro Valley County Park website. Right now, the organization seeks more volunteers.

The president of the Friends organization, Mila Stroganoff, said, "People seek refuge in nature because of its serenity. We don't readily understand why this serenity exists in open spaces, parks, natural ecosystems, yet these islands of sanity provide, I believe, efficiency in living, growing, and dying, which we find healing. In one way or another we strive to spend time in these remarkable places. The Friends of San Pedro Valley County Park is a group of volunteers that has come together to 'give back' to San Pedro Valley County Park. By taking care of the park and educating people of all ages regarding its many natural beauties, both flora and fauna, keeping the visitor center open on Saturdays and Sundays for visitors of the park,



Spectacular view from San Pedro Valley County Park

PHOTO SHARRON WALKER

engaging in trail work or habitat restoration, we provide essential services. The museum, located in the visitor center, is a splendid place to spend time and provides a home for a small reference library and a trailside store."

There are seven trails for visitors in the park - Brooks Creek Trail, Hazelnut Trail, Montara Mountain Trail, Old Trout Farm Loop Trail, Plaskon Nature Trail, Valley View Trail and Weiler Ranch Trail. They are described in detail on the Friends of San Pedro Valley County Park website.

Brooks Creek Trail is short and provides a link between Trout Farm Trail and Montara Mountain Trail.

Hazelnut Trail connects the valleys of the south and middle forks of San Pedro

Creek. It climbs from shaded creekside through oaks. Two meadows are further up the trail. The trail affords a great view of San Pedro Creek and Montara Mountain, Linda Mar Beach and the ocean at the top.

Montara Mountain Trail - Past the eucalyptus, there are views of coastal Pacifica and the ocean. Challenging switchbacks go over granite rocks and red clay. At 1,600 feet of elevation gain, it continues to McNeer Ranch State Park where the trail rises to 1,898 feet. Views offer San Francisco Bay, Montara State Beach and Half Moon Bay.

Old Trout Farm Loop Trail is a good bird watching area through pine and eucalyptus trees.

Plaskon Nature Trail is a

short walk along the South Fork of San Pedro Creek.

Valley View Trail shows the park's different microclimates along a south facing ridge and a north facing ridge. It goes through open grasslands. In the spring on the top, there is a large display of wild iris. With the warmth of the south facing slopes, it's a great place to find reptiles, such as Western fence lizards, Alligator lizards and gopher snakes. The calls of many birds can be heard.

Weiler Ranch Trail heads toward the Walnut Grove picnic area, crossing the bridge over the south fork of San Pedro Creek where steelhead trout may be spotted. Wild flowers, such as sticky monkey flower, coyote mint, and California black-

berry can be seen.

Stroganoff suggested Weiler Ranch Trail and Hazelnut Trail.

"Weiler Ranch Road, an easy trail, one that is heavily used, yet full of wildlife. Bobcats, Mule Deer, Brush Rabbits, California Quail, coyote, foxes, birds all can be seen or heard while walking, running, jogging, or even bicycling as long as we keep our ears and eyes aware of what is around us," she said. "Take the Hazelnut Trail, a rigorous trail yet well known for its native plants. Spot the Hazelnut, Douglas Iris, Red and Blue Elderberry, Madrone, Coast Live Oak, Golden Chinquapin, Silktassel, shrubs and spring wildflowers. You may see Red-tailed hawks and Turkey Vultures riding thermals or even discover a Wood Rat nest. The possibilities are endless and never a dull moment to be had."

The Friends of San Pedro Valley County Park website is also a good habitat guide and has historical facts. Five kinds of habitats - chaparral, coastal scrub, eucalyptus forest grassland and riparian - support plant life and animal life.

Chaparral is woody and varies from stands of manzanita, golden chinquapin and California huckleberry to stands of hazelnut. Coastal scrub - The dominant shrub is coyote brush, but there is also sagebrush, blackberry and poison oak. Eucalyptus forest - the Tasmanian blue gum Eucalyptus globulus thrives. Grasslands - In small patches along Hazelnut Trail, annual wildflowers bloom. Riparian - streamside habitat contains native plants such as red alder, arroyo willow and creek dogwood, birds, and the threatened steelhead trout.

"San Pedro Valley Park is the gem of San Mateo County Parks! As a teacher I found it a wonderful resource for my students, as a volunteer I delight in the sharing of its flora, fauna and diverse habitats, and as a photographer I am constantly challenged to capture its nature and beauty!" said Sharron Walker.

Numerous fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals make the park their home.

"I grew up in Chicago. Only wild life was squirrels and pigeons. When I moved to Pacifica and saw this park with all the wildlife, I was in love! I studied in the park for my teacher's credential, cried in the park during my divorce and when I lost my father and son. I even got married in the park. Then I joined the group called the Friends. They are a wonderful and diverse group and have been a member ever since," said Judy Bacon.

Stroganoff urges all to join the Friends by calling her at 650-359-1642 or by visiting the Friends website at friendsofsanpedrovalley-park.org for more information.

"My love of nature and my studies to better understand how the natural world works have kept me busy. Understanding has led to a greater appreciation and love for the wonderful ecosystems that exist in the park. We need your help to maintain the programs and activities that the Friends do year round. Please consider joining us," she said.

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