

President's Day Savings!

BREAKING NEWS | As storm takes aim at Bay Area, when will the heavy rain arrive?

East Bay's Park It: Martinez's new Miller trail makes for a mighty fine walk



By NED MACKEY | November 26, 2014 at 11:20 am

Since the new George Miller Regional Trail linking Martinez and Port Costa opened with great fanfare on Nov. 8, it seemed appropriate to take the full walk myself and report back on the experience.

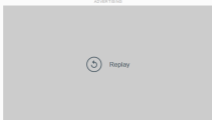
I'm glad to say that the trail more than lives up to the hype. It's an easy round trip of just less than 3½ miles through a mostly wooded landscape, with a few gentle grades along the way. Set high above the shoreline, the trail provides spectacular views of Carquinez Strait and its maritime traffic, the city of Benicia and Mount Diablo peeping around the corner.

The trail is a 1.7-mile paved section of Carquinez Scenic Drive on which no motorized traffic is allowed except for service and emergency vehicles. You can access it from either the Martinez or Port Costa side. From Martinez, drive west on Carquinez Scenic Drive past Alhambra Cemetery. From Port Costa, drive down McEwen Road from Highway 4, then turn right on the drive.

One caveat: you have to park alongside the road at either end of the trail, though a parking lot is planned in the future on the Port Costa side. On the Martinez side, there's ample parking available at the Nejedly Staging Area. From there, though, you would either have to walk a mile or so on a part of Carquinez Scenic Drive where motor vehicles are still allowed, or follow trails through Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline over Franklin Ridge to a point closer to the start of the George Miller Regional Trail.

Check the map that's available at www.ebparks.org to see what I'm talking about. Click on "Carquinez Strait" on the right side of the home page, and scroll down to the map. Though the map shows a section of the scenic drive as closed for construction, it's not any more. That section is now the Miller trail.

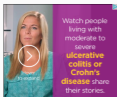
If you do park alongside the road, be sure not to block any of the gates that open onto park fire roads. The "No Parking" signs are for real; those gates give access for routine park maintenance and in case of fire or other emergency.



Once on the trail it's easy walking, bicycling or horseback riding. Dogs must be kept on leashes. Cyclists must observe the 15 mile-per-hour speed limit. This is especially important because there are lots of blind curves. When I walked the trail I encountered several family groups with children in strollers. The trail is wide, but you never know what's out of sight just around the bend, so mutual courtesy is always appreciated.

What is the purpose of those small, square concrete pads off to the side of the trail at intervals along the way? Several people asked, and I didn't know myself, so I got an answer from the rangers. They are level resting areas designed so people who use wheelchairs can take a break while rolling uphill. Federal funding paid for part of the trail construction, and the feature is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

All in all, the Miller trail is a great new addition to the East Bay Regional Park District's park and trail network. And it's a vital link in the San Francisco Bay Trail, which will ultimately encircle the bay. The park district has purchased additional properties at the Port Costa end, with planning under way for future amenities. So by all means check out the George Miller Regional Trail for an easy and scenic stroll.



FREMONT: At Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont, overwintering by monarch butterflies is an annual natural phenomenon. Though the butterfly numbers are hard to predict, Ardenwood's interpretive staff conducts a series of programs highlighting the butterflies' migrations, including walks to the park's groves to view the insects clustering shingle-fashion on eucalyptus branches.

There's a "Mysterious Monarchs" program from 1 to 2 p.m. Friday through Sunday. Come to see if the butterflies return, learn about their life cycle and make a caterpillar craft to take home. "Marvelous Monarchs," a whole series of monarch butterfly-themed programs, is scheduled from 11 a.m. to noon Dec. 13-14, 20-21 and 27-28. Meet at the granary.

That's not all. There are also programs scheduled at Ardenwood's greenhouse at 1:30 p.m. on the same Saturdays and Sundays as just listed. And Ardenwood plans its annual Victorian-style Christmas celebration from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 6-7.

Always great fun, the celebration includes visits with Father Christmas, tours of the beautifully decorated Patterson House, a search for the Yule log, live music, a puppet show and Christmas crafts. The fee for the Christmas event is \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$4 for children and free for ages 3 and younger. Parking is free. Ardenwood is located at 34600 Ardenwood Blvd., just north of Highway 84. For more information on the monarch programs and Ardenwood's fees, call 510-544-2797.

COYOTE HILLS: If you sense that you overindulged a bit during Thanksgiving, join naturalist Francis Mendoza at Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont for a "Burn off that Turkey!" bike ride from 9 to 11 a.m. Sunday. Francis will lead a 6-mile ride on a trail with gentle slopes, partly paved and partly gravel.

The ride is for ages 15 and older. It's free, and no reservations are needed. Meet at the park visitor center at the end of Patterson Ranch Road off Paseo Padre Parkway. Coyote Hills has a \$5 parking fee per vehicle. For information, call 510-544-3220.

ALAMEDA: Crab Cove Visitor Center in Alameda plans a day of post-Thanksgiving fun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday. Activities will include a video about water and ocean creatures from 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. with popcorn and cider, family fun nature hour from 2 to 3 p.m. featuring experiments with bay water, and fish feeding at the center aquarium from 3 to 3:30 p.m. Crab Cove is at 1252 McKay Ave. For information, call 510-544-3187.

Berkeley: Scat, spiders and ferns, oh my! All three topics will be covered in separate free programs Sunday at Tilden Nature Area near Berkeley.

Naturalist Anthony Fisher will discuss scat and how to identify animals from it in a session from 9 to 11 a.m. He'll take up the topic of spiders in a talk from 12:30 to 2 p.m. including some live examples. And interpretive student aide Morgan Rami Evans will feature ferns, especially those that grow in the nature area, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. All three programs meet at Tilden's Environmental Education Center, which is at the north end of Central Park Drive. For information, call 510-544-2253.

ANTIOCH: Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve in Antioch will host its last mine open house of the season from noon to 4:30 p.m. Sunday.

Visitors ages 7 and older will be able to take free self-guided tours underground through the park's mining museum, with park staff along the way to point out interesting features. For younger children, there's a room just inside the mine entrance with interactive displays. Dogs are not allowed in the mine but can be with their owners in the room by the entrance.

After Nov. 30 the underground mining museum closes until the first weekend in March. Black Diamond Mines is located on Somersville Road 5 miles south of Highway 4 in Antioch. There's a parking fee of \$5 per vehicle when the kiosk is attended. For information, call 888-327-2757, ext. 2750.

PLEASANTON: An ascent to a great view, with wildlife along the way, is the attraction of a ramble from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday at Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park, led by naturalist "Trail" Gail Broecker. It's free of charge. If you come, bring water and snacks, wear sturdy hiking shoes. Meet at the park's Foothill Staging Area off Foothill Road west of Interstate 680 in Pleasanton. For information, call 888-327-2757, ext. 2253.

Ned MacKay writes a regular column about East Bay Regional Park District sites and activities. Email him at nedmackay@comcast.net.

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