

Head for the Hills

The East Bay's greenbelt offers an outdoor getaway for city dwellers. BY ANN MARIE BROWN

Rising above the homes of 2 million East Bay residents is a precious natural refuge—the gently folded slopes of the Berkeley and Oakland hills. This sheltered greenbelt forms a permanent boundary for the sprawling cities below and harbors a variety of parklands. Despite abutting an urban area, the hills feature a landscape which could be that of a remote wilderness: towering redwoods, windswept grasslands, freshwater lakes, abundant wildlife, and botanical and geological wonders. Traversing the ridgeline is the 31-mile East Bay Skyline National Trail, which connects seven regional parks and preserves, in addition to smaller parks, historical sites, and even a few mysteries.

Wildcat Canyon Regional Park

Hikers and mountain bikers can choose between a level jaunt along Wildcat Creek or a rigorous climb to the top of 1,057-foot San Pablo Ridge, where red-tailed hawks soar. At twilight, you may hear the hoot of a great horned owl.

Tilden Regional Park

Considered the jewel of the East Bay Regional Park system, Tilden Park encompasses 2,077 acres, on which you can swim at Lake Anza or play a round of golf. Children feed the barnyard animals at Little Farm or climb aboard a miniature steam train or, in summer, mount the trusty steeds at the Pony Ride. More than 150,000 visitors a year ride the 59 carved wooden animals on Tilden's 1911 carousel. Cap off the day with an easy stroll on Nimitz Way Trail (five miles are wheelchair accessible) or, for a view, try a more ambitious ascent to the summit of Wildcat or Vollmer peaks. The 10-acre Botanic Garden tucked into Tilden boasts the most complete collection of California native plants anywhere, including manzanita and ceanothus (wild lilac). Look for the rare Oakland starflower in spring.



Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve

Surrounded by Berkeley neighborhoods, this undeveloped preserve has a steep .75-mile trail that makes for a heart-pumping ascent to an unforgettable panorama. At the top, sit on a bench and count the ships in San Francisco Bay.

Temescal Regional Recreation Area

Catch a fish or swim at this urban oasis at the junction of Highways 13 and 24. Created in 1868, Lake Temescal is the oldest man-made lake in the East Bay.

Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve

About 10 million years ago, Round Top volcano blew its lid. Today, you can examine the remains of lava flows, cinder piles, and volcanic ash. Even more otherworldly are two mysterious stone labyrinths, each about one foot high and 60 feet across.

Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve

This verdant woodland is an unusual ecosystem. Native shrubs, such as evergreen huckleberry and pink flowering currant, typically species of the coast, grow here and almost nowhere else in the East Bay.

Redwood Regional Park

Redwood Creek, which bisects the park, is home to a pure, native strain of rainbow trout. Hikers can tromp a moderate 7.5 miles on Stream and French trails; mountain bikers can pedal an 8.2-mile loop around the park. Next to Redwood Park is the Chabot Space & Science Center, where you can stargaze through massive telescopes.

Joaquin Miller Park

Known as the "Poet of the Sierra," Joaquin Miller in 1886 settled in the Oakland Hills, where he planted more than 75,000 trees. Here you'll find historic structures, a series of fountains called the Cascade, and picnic areas. The park's Woodminster Amphitheater hosts summer musicals.

Anthony Chabot Regional Park

There's something for everyone: a 75-site campground, picnic areas, and hiking trails. Lake Chabot offers trout and catfish to angle for and boats to rent (canoes, motorboats, paddleboats, and rowboats). The 12.5-mile Lake Chabot Loop is the playground of mountain bikers, while horse lovers head to Chabot Equestrian Center for guided rides. On summer weekends, the *Chabot Queen* tour boat shuttles hikers, anglers, and bird-watchers around the lake.

