

Hike Statistics

Starting point: Visitor center / parking lot

Distance: 3.5

Time: Allow about 3 hours

Grade: Moderate

Suggested age: Bears, Webelos

Suggested Season: Fall, spring, summer.

Flag Hill East Bay Parks: Sunol Regional Wilderness, Sunol, CA

A moderately strenuous hike will take you to the top of Flag Hill, which is composed of layers of fossil-rich sandstone formed some 13 million years ago. You'll enjoy great views and good opportunities to watch birds and other wildlife. Ambitious hikers may take an optional detour to Indian Joe Cave Rocks.

Hike Description

Begin this hike by crossing Alameda Creek on the footbridge near park headquarters. Turn left (downstream). After a short distance, Flag Hill Trail will take off uphill, to the right. The trail zigzags up the face of the hill (make sure your hikers understand why it's important not to shortcut switchbacks). After about a mile of rather steep uphill hiking, you'll reach the top where you'll probably want to take a good snack or lunch break. While on top, watch for red-tailed hawks (the red upper surface of the tail is visible when the hawk turns), turkey vultures (which hold their wings in a slight "V" and teeter in flight), and maybe even a golden eagle or falcon.

Continue your hike by dropping down the back side of Flag Hill, turning right when you reach High Valley Road. Return to the cars by way of Hayfield Road.

Alternate Routes

For a more ambitious hike with a highlight the boys are sure to love, take a detour to the Indian Joe Cave Rocks just after you go through High Valley. Remind the boys about rattlesnakes before letting them explore these huge jumbled boulders. Return to the cars by way of the Indian Joe Creek Trail. The detour will add about 0.7 miles to your total distance, and is well worth it.

This hike is also nice in reverse (visiting the Cave Rocks first, then Flag Hill), but going down the steep Flag Hill Trail can be hard on the knees.

Historical and Natural Features

Sunol Regional Park area was inhabited by the Ohlone Indians for about 4000 years. In 1797, when the mission was built at Mission San Jose, most of the Indians moved to the mission. The Indian camp was located on the same site as the Green Barn and park office are now located.

In 1865, a family named Geary homesteaded the area and built what is now the access road into the park, Geary Road. Enough people moved into the area to establish a school.

The Sunol Valley has offered recreational opportunities for several generations to campers. Campers from San Francisco set up campsites in the Sunol Valley before the turn of the century. The Geary's took part in encouraging recreational use of the area by selling goods and providing transportation to the campsites from the railroad station in Sunol. On the Fourth of July in 1903, a group of children climbed a hill located north of the present park headquarters, and planted a flag. The hill thereafter was known as Flag Hill.

In the 1930's the land was purchased by a man named Brinker. He built the barn at High valley, and perished while fighting a fire on the property.

The East Bay Regional Park District purchased the land in 1959. Sunol Regional Park opened to visitors in 1960.