NATURAL HISTORY FEATURES

Bounded by Portola Valley, Los Altos Hills, the Pearson-Arastradero Preserve and Los Trancos Open Space, the 1,400-acre Foothills Park is a nature lover’s paradise. Fifteen miles of trails provide access to three distinct habitats: chaparral, oak woodland and grasslands.

Chaparral plant communities, found on many south-facing slopes and ridges in the park, are adapted to hot, dry conditions. Deep root systems and small, thick leaves positioned to reduce surface area exposed to the sun, are adaptations these plants have developed to help conserve moisture. Chamise is the dominant plant species, along with manzanita, ceanothus, and scrub oak.

The Oak Woodland community is represented by coast live oak, California buckeye, madrone, California laurel, and the ever-present poison oak. Common wildlife include the dusky-footed woodrat, white-footed mouse, scrub jay, andander salamander (near Boronda Lake).

California’s summer-gold Grasslands are dominated by annual species that arrived here as seeds in the fur and hooves of livestock brought by early European settlers. These grasses have largely crowded out the native grasses that colored the hillsides gray-green in summer. In fact, many of today’s grasslands were evergreen forests or oak woodlands before woodcutting and livestock grazing took their toll. Grasslands are home to huge numbers of rodents such as mice, gophers, jackrabbits, insects; and larger predators like bobcats, red-tailed hawks, owls and coyotes.

Athletic and highly intelligent, coyotes play an indispensable role in California open spaces, where they are often the top predator. Coyotes keep rodent populations (mice, gophers, ground squirrels, and rabbits) in balance, helping to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

HISTORY

For at least 3,000 years, these hills were the hunting grounds and summer home of the native Ohlone people. During the dry season they left their permanent settlements along the bay shore for seasonal camps near upland creeks and streams.

In 1833 the Mexican governor of Alta California granted a square league (4,400 acres) of land above Los Trancos and San Francisquito creeks to Domingo Peralta and Don Maximo Martinez. This was the beginning of Rancho del Corte Madera, “the place of the woodcutters.”

After a Martinez daughter married into the Boronda family the property became known as Boronda Farm. A San Francisco stockbroker who bought the land from the Borondas in 1914 planted fruit trees and other exotic species in what is now the Orchard Glen Picnic Area. In 1958 they sold 1,194 acres to the City of Palo Alto for $1,000 an acre, with the intention of preserving the land for open space. Foothills Park was opened to residents of Palo Alto in 1965.

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Bay-to-Ridge Trail access to Pearson-Arastradero Preserve. Pedestrians only.

Bay-to-Ridge Trail access to Los Trancos Open Space Preserve. Pedestrians only.

PARK RULES
• No smoking.
• Dogs on leash permitted except on weekends and holidays.
• Bicycles are allowed on paved roads only, and not on trails. Bicycle helmets are required.
• Coasting devices (e.g., skates, scooters, skateboarders) are not allowed.
• charcoal fires in existing barbecues only.
• Speed Limit is 20 MPH throughout the park.
• Golf practice, hardball and powered models are not allowed in the park.
• Feeding wildlife is prohibited.
• Remote controlled devices are not permitted.