

Memorial Park, County of San Mateo Parks, San Mateo County

In brief:

5 mile loop at this popular camping park: a perfect dayhike for beginners.

Distance, category, and difficulty:

This 5 mile loop hike on well graded trails is easy, with about 800 feet in elevation change. Trailhead elevation is about 250 feet. The park's high point is about 900 feet.

Exposure:

Mix of shade and sun.

Trail traffic:

Usually light, but trails get busier in summer.

Trail surfaces:

Dirt trails.

Hiking time:

2 1/2 hours.

Season:

Nice any time.

Getting there:

- From CA 1 in San Mateo County, turn east on Pescadero Road. Drive about 8 miles to the park entrance on the right side of the road.
- From Interstate 280 in San Mateo County, exit CA 84. Drive west about 6.5 miles to the junction with CA 35, then continue west on 84 about 6.5 miles to the junction with Pescadero Road. Turn left and drive about 1 mile, then bear right to stay on Pescadero Road at the junction with Alpine Road. Drive about 4.3 more miles on Pescadero Road to the park entrance on the left side of the road.

Get driving or public transit directions from Transit and Trails:

<http://www.transitandtrails.org/trailheads/114>

GPS Coordinates* for Trailhead:

Latitude 37°16'31.83"N
Longitude 122°17'27.88"W
(* based on [Google Earth](#) data, shown as degrees, minutes, seconds)

Gas, food, and lodging:

Gas, restaurant, and picnic goodies available in Pescadero (about 8 miles west of the park). Memorial's small store stocks limited items

and is open only from Memorial Day through September. Phone across from entrance kiosk. There are individual and group campsites in the park, as well as reservable picnic areas.

Trailhead details:

\$5 entrance fee (self-register if kiosk is unattended, at the iron ranger on the right just past the kiosk). Maps available at entrance kiosk when it is staffed. Park at the Tanoak Picnic Area (bear left after kiosk, then drive downhill past the store - it's about 0.1 mile from the kiosk). Plenty of day use parking. Toilets and drinking water available in picnic area. Although there are designated handicapped parking spots, trails on the far side of Pescadero Road are not wheelchair friendly. There is no direct public transportation to the park.

Rules:

No horses, bikes, or dogs. Park is open for day use from 8 a.m. to sunset (hours vary slightly throughout the year).

The Official Story:

CSMPD's Memorial Park page

Some people just can't get beyond the name. "Memorial Park? Sounds like a cemetery," was a comment from a friend when I mentioned my trip to San Mateo County's small park somewhat lost and unknown among the larger neighboring Pescadero Creek and Portola parks. Memorial Park's name seems a little strange, but consider that the land, acquired by the county in 1924, was named for the men of San Mateo County who were killed in World War I. Somehow the sentiment seems appropriate for a park huddled under redwoods; these reverent old trees encourage contemplation. Pets, horses, and bikes are not permitted in the park, and that lends to the tranquil atmosphere.

Upon arrival at Memorial, you may get the feeling that day hikers, while welcome, aren't the park's bread and butter. The main attractions at this park nestled back in the forest on the shores of Pescadero Creek, are camping and picnicking. On my



first visit I drove around for a while wondering where to park; all the roads seem to lead to campsites. I finally asked a ranger and was directed to the Tanoak Picnic Area, where I parked in the deserted lot.

Memorial lends itself to a getaway weekend of day hiking and camping. From the park you can hike into Pescadero Creek County Park, or further yet, to Portola State Park, or even into Butano State Park. After a day of hiking, you could return to the park, take a swim in the creek, then sleep peacefully under the redwoods.

Inside Memorial there are a few trails that wind through and around the campgrounds and picnic areas on the south side of Pescadero Road, but better hiking can be found on the north side of the road. Pomponio Trail, Mt. Ellen Nature Trail, and

0.23 mile, the trail splits at a signed junction. Bear left, following the signs for Pomponio Trail.

This leg of Mt. Ellen Nature Trail ascends slightly through the woods on a narrow path. Look for redwood sorrel, yerba buena, starflower, and trillium in the spring. At 0.33 mile, the trail splits at a signed junction. Take the trail to the left, downhill, toward Pomponio Trail.

Fallen trees litter the forest floor. In autumn a bigleaf maple is conspicuous. You'll pass a signpost confirming you're headed to Pomponio Trail, and then at 0.43 mile, you'll reach an undersigned junction. A fire road heads back to Pescadero Road to the left. Turn right onto Pomponio Trail.

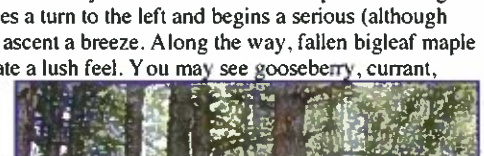


The wide, hiking-only trail starts out under redwoods, along a creek. A sunny little clearing along the trail is overgrown with blackberries and nettles. As Pomponio Trail starts a slight climb, look for dogwood, thimbleberry, hazelnut, and creambush. Poison oak is common. Redwoods are left behind and in their absence you'll have a clear view uphill to the right,



of the chaparral and Douglas fir dotted ridgeline. The trail makes a turn to the left and begins a serious (although still easy) climb. A series of long, broad switchbacks make the ascent a breeze. Along the way, fallen bigleaf maple leaves add color and crunch to a hike in autumn, and ferns create a lush feel. You may see gooseberry, currant, coast live oak, California bay, huckleberry, and hazelnut. Forget-me-not blooms are abundant from late winter through spring. Huge old Douglas firs hold court on the sides of the

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Map Choices:

- Use AAA's *San Francisco Bay Region* map to get to the park.
- [Map from CSMP](#).
- Dave Baseli's *Pescadero Creek County Park/Portola Redwoods State Park* map is an excellent guide to the trails of Memorial Park as well ([order from Redwood Hikes](#)).
- *Afoot and Afield: San Francisco Bay Area*, by David Weintraub ([order this book from Amazon.com](#)) has a great map and descriptions of a Memorial hike.
- *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area*, by Ann Marie Brown ([order this book from Amazon.com](#)) has a simple map and featured hike.
- *Peninsula Trails*, by Jean Rusmore, Frances Spangle, and Betsy Crowder ([order this book from Amazon.com](#)) has a simple map and some suggested hikes.
- Tom Taber's *The Santa Cruz Mountains Trail Book* has a simple map ([order this book from Amazon.com](#)).

 [Memorial Park in a nutshell](#) – a printable, text-only guide to the featured hike.

- [View 76 photos from the featured hike.](#)

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trail. As the fire road narrows, a fence to the left marks the park boundary, and Pomponio Trail steps out of the shade and into sunny chaparral. Coyote brush, ceanothus, California coffeeberry, creambush, bush monkeyflower, sagebrush, and poison oak are common. Views open up to the south. The path is slight and ascends almost imperceptibly. A rest bench on the left makes a great rest or lunch spot. Although the park's map shows a path leading to a viewpoint, this trail is no longer maintained -- you may notice the faint overgrown trace of the path, however, across the trail from a Pomponio Trail signpost. A slump in the hillside has left a few feet of the trail lumpy and unstable. You might see California fuchsia and coyote mint blooming in late summer. Douglas firs edge into the chaparral, and the trail starts a subtle downhill tack. Pomponio Trail ducks beneath a few coast live oaks draped with lace lichen, then cuts through the chaparral one last time before returning to tree cover. After a few switchbacks and a very short climb, the trail drops down to a signed junction at 3.93 miles. You can cut this hike short by continuing straight and returning on the Mt. Ellen Nature Trail, but for the featured hike **bear left onto Mt. Ellen Summit Trail**.



A few short stiff switchbacks sweep uphill to the narrow ridge line. A segment of fence seems out of place here, but if you carefully peak over the side, you'll notice an alarming dropoff. Partial views to the north are mostly blocked by Douglas firs. Narrow Mt. Ellen Summit Trail, open to hikers only, picks its way along the ridge. Look for nuts on hazelnut shrubs in August, and in autumn, red berries from toyon and honeysuckle brighten the Douglas fir and coast live oak woods. The summit is not signed, but it is marked, in a way, by an exposed large flat, sandy rock. Mt. Ellen Summit Trail starts a descent, with switchbacks keeping the grade moderate. Fallen needles on the path mark the reemergence of redwoods, and they are accompanied by California bays and lush forest vegetation, with lots of hazelnut and blackberry brambles. At

4.73 miles, **stay to the left** as Mt. Ellen Nature Trail heads right at a signed junction.

The trail continues downhill. You might notice a little bunch of buckeye trees, somewhat out of place in a redwood forest. At 4.83 miles, you'll reach a previously encountered junction with the other end of Mt. Ellen Nature Trail. **Turn left and retrace your steps back to the trailhead.**

Total distance: 5.06 miles (includes the out-and-back walk from the parking area)

Last hiked: Wednesday, September 18, 2002

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