

Four new trails

La Honda Creek Open Space

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Driving up Skyline Boulevard on a sunny weekday is one of my favorite expeditions. It's a great way to experience beautiful nature views, escape traffic, and explore something new. Sometimes this means stretching out a little farther, for example, traveling north on Skyline to La Honda Creek Open Space on Highway 84 or beyond. I've hiked there four times.

On my first visit in January 2018, I drove down Highway 84 to the Sears Ranch entrance. The 20-car parking lot was almost full. I walked a wide trail where people could walk side-by-side through a large open valley where we could see grass-covered mountains. Grazing cows presented a bucolic scene. The ups and downs were relatively easy from 600 to 800 feet elevation. It was an out-and-back hike of about six miles.

My second hike took me to the Allen Road entrance at the north end of the preserve. It required a permit that gave me solitude but no water, restrooms, maps, or guides. (Maps are now available.)

I followed a broad shady trail to a small clearing where a narrow path took me about half a mile to what my map called "Big Tree." This 14-foot-diameter redwood was scarred and burned, but it had survived for hundreds of years. I walked back to the main trail, then turned left. A short walk brought me out of the forest into grassland where I saw an occupied residence and some old, deserted farm buildings. A small hill took me to a vista



point with some nice views. It was a view worth a three-mile walk.

My next visit to the Sears Ranch Road entrance was special. On June 3, 2022, I was invited to the opening of the new Grasshopper Loop trail where we celebrated Midpeninsula Open Space's 50th birthday, reaching 250 miles of public trail, and protecting 65,000 acres of greenbelt. We met Midpen's general manager, board members, employees, volunteers, friends, and several dogs.

It was enjoyable, but the best part was walking the then-new 1.3-mile trail Grasshopper Loop. It offered minimal elevation gain on an easy walk through a varied landscape of grassland, oak woodlands, and redwood forest. Scenic views of distant hills were dotted with grazing cattle. A smooth dirt trail carried us through a forest with bigger trees. I walked out of the shade and found a scenic viewpoint and a comfortable bench.

This trail was easy, scenic, and with enough variety to keep it interesting. I recommend it for families and walkers of any age.

In January, on Martin Luther King Junior's birthday, I planned to see the new La Honda trails that connect the north and south entrances to a recently completed 17-mile trail network. I received my permit in just two working days, complete with a map, directions, and codes for access through a locked gate to a secure parking area.

Allen Road was narrow and slow, and it took some time to set the code number and open the lock. I did retrieve a map from the information board. My walk to

the new trails started with a long downhill trek though forest followed by a long uphill in open country to Vista Point where I climbed to the top with only one rest stop. It was



