

Mount Tamalpais State Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (415) 388-2070. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Mount Tamalpais State Park

801 Panoramic Highway

Mill Valley, CA 94941

(415) 388-2070

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*The panorama from
the 2,571-foot peak
is breathtaking.*

*On a clear day, view the
Farallon Islands out to
sea, the Marin County
hills, Mount Diablo, San
Francisco, and the hills
and cities of the bay.*



North of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, **Mount Tamalpais State Park rises majestically from the heart of Marin County.** Mount Tamalpais captures our attention with its sweeping hillsides cloaked with chaparral-covered ridges, grasslands and oak woodlands. Deep canyons filled with solemn redwood groves intersect these ridges and slopes to create a diverse environment for a wide array of plant and animal species.

The breathtaking panorama from Mount Tamalpais's 2,571-foot peak includes the Farallon Islands 25 miles out to sea, the Marin County hills, San Francisco Bay and the east bay, and Mount Diablo.

Spring and summer temperatures are warm, with average highs in the 70s and 80s. Fall and winter can be cool, with temperatures in the 50s; fog is common.

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CULTURAL HISTORY

Native People

The Coast Miwok lived on or near Mount Tamalpais for thousands of years before Europeans arrived, living near water sources throughout present-day Marin County. These California Indians hunted small animals and deer, collected acorns, and gathered flora, marsh plants and shellfish. They made baskets and clamshell disk beads, trading them for locally unobtainable resources, such as high-grade obsidian from Lake County tribes. The Coast Miwok had a rich culture and a complex and intricate language. However, their way of life changed soon after the arrival of Europeans.

In 1770 two explorers, Captain Pedro Fages and Father Juan Crespí, named the mountain *La Sierra de Nuestro Padre de San Francisco*. This was later

changed to the Miwok word *tamalpais* (tam-al-pie-us), which roughly translated means “bay mountain” or “coast mountain.”

Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway

Residents of San Francisco, whose population exploded after the 1848 gold discovery, used Mount Tamalpais for recreational purposes. Trails were developed, and a wagon road was built to the top of the mountain in 1884.

The Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway, completed in 1896, carried visitors to the scenic mountaintop and the Summit Tavern, a hotel and restaurant. The slope from Mill Valley to the summit was so steep that the railroad had to negotiate 281 curves, equivalent to 42 complete circles, earning it the title of “Crookedest Railroad in the World.” In the section known as the “Double Bow Knot,” the track paralleled itself five times within 200 yards. In 1907 a gravity car line was designed to transport visitors from the top of the mountain to the redwood-filled canyon of Muir Woods. Requiring only gravity and a brake, special open-air cars carried passengers down the mountain to Muir Woods at an exhilarating 12 mph. The gravity cars allowed sightseers to travel from Mill Valley to the summit, down to Muir Woods, and then back to Mill Valley.

The Scenic Railway's famous gravity cars were popular until the advent of the automobile and the construction of Ridgecrest Boulevard in 1922. A gravity car replica is displayed at the new Gravity Car Barn on East Peak.

Conservation Efforts

Over the years, millions have flocked to

the mountain, affectionately called “Mount Tam,” to relish the spectacular views and hike its trails. Generations of Mount Tam enthusiasts have worked hard to protect the mountain and keep it open to the public. The oldest of these citizen groups is the Tamalpais Conservation Club, organized in 1912. In 1928 William Kent, an ardent Marin County conservationist, and his wife donated 200 acres of land in Steep Ravine to help create Mount Tamalpais State Park. The park was later enlarged through the efforts of several hiking clubs led by the Tamalpais Conservation Club. These organizations orchestrated a grassroots campaign to purchase additional state park land.



Gravity car on Mount Tam's Scenic Railway, ca. 1900

THE STATE PARK TODAY

Now one of the oldest and most popular units of the California State Park System, the park has grown to 6,300 acres. Completely surrounding Muir Woods National Monument, the park is bordered by Marin Municipal Water District land on the north and by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area on the northwest and south.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology

Many people think the 2,571-foot peak is the remnant of an extinct volcano. However, geologists believe that Mount Tamalpais was created due to its location near the San Andreas Fault, one of the world's most active faults. Over time, the mountain has risen from the earth's crust, while erosion has left only solid rock exposed in the highest peaks and ridges.

Common rock types here are graywacke (sandstone), shale, greenstone, chert, quartz tourmaline and the easily-identified green serpentine, California's official state rock.

Plant Life

The varied topography and soils of the park support a tremendous diversity of plant life. More than 750 plant species can be found in the park. Hikers pass through open grassland, chaparral and oak-covered knolls, or descend through dense stands of Douglas-fir and California laurel into deep, fern- and redwood-filled canyons.

In spring the slopes of Mount Tam come alive with the vibrant colors of wildflowers. Hillsides are sprinkled with California poppies, lupines, Douglas irises, goldfields and shooting stars. Spotted coralroot, fetid adder's tongue and Pacific trillium are among the plants that hide in the deep shade of the forest.

The Redwood Forest

Mount Tam's legendary Steep Ravine Trail leads hikers along Webb Creek through a stand of tall redwood trees. The sound of rushing water prepares visitors for the fragrance of damp earth and the sight of ferns along the creek's banks. The redwoods form a canopy above the water cascading over the rocks. Alongside the cascade, hikers must climb a steep ladder to return to the beginning of this beautiful trail.

Animal Life

Raccoons, gray foxes, squirrels, bobcats, coyotes, black-tailed deer, and, occasionally, mountain lions sometimes roam the mountain slopes. Bears and elk once wandered the land, but vanished as a result of hunting and ranching before the park was established.

Birdwatchers can view more than 150 species of birds within or very near the park. Red-tailed

hawks, northern harriers and turkey vultures soar over the open grasslands by day, while the sounds of great horned, spotted, barn and screech owls fill the night. The hollow drilling of pileated, acorn, and hairy woodpeckers adds to the forest sounds. Along the coastline, there are numerous oceanic and intertidal birds to identify.



Red-tailed Hawk

RECREATION

Hiking—Hikers enjoy more than 50 miles of trails in the park that connect to a 200-mile trail system over land managed by the Marin Municipal Water District and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Day-Use Areas—Bootjack picnic area, on the Panoramic Highway northeast of Pantoll, has tables, stoves, drinking water and flush toilets. The area accommodates groups of up to 50 picnickers.

East Peak summit has picnic tables, an accessible restroom, a visitor center staffed on weekends, and a refreshment stand open intermittently during the summer.

Mountain Theater—The 3,750-seat Mountain Theater, officially the Cushing Memorial Amphitheatre, was built of natural stone in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The theater can be reserved for special events. Each spring since 1913, the Mountain Play Association theatrical company has presented outdoor productions of Broadway musicals. For dates and reservations of Mountain Theater performances, contact the Mountain Play Association at (415) 383-1100.





Spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay area can be seen from the Verna Dunshee Trail near East Peak.

Camping—Several campgrounds are open all year. The Pantoll Campground, on the Panoramic Highway, has 16 sites approximately 100 yards from the parking area. Drinking water, firewood and restrooms with flush toilets are nearby. There are no showers. Campsites are available first-come, first-served.

Rocky Point-Steep Ravine Environmental Campground, on a marine terrace one mile south of Stinson Beach, has seven primitive sites and nine rustic cabins. Each cabin has a small wood stove, picnic table, sleeping platforms and an outdoor barbecue, but no running water. Restrooms and water faucets are nearby. Reservations are highly recommended.

The Alice Eastwood Group Camp, located on the Panoramic Highway near the Mountain Home Inn, has two sites for organized groups of 25 to 50 people. Both sites have tables, barbecue grills and a large area for tents.

Frank Valley Group Horse Camp, on Muir Woods Road about one mile north of Highway 1 at Muir Beach, has tables, fire rings, drinking water, pit toilets, two horse troughs and corrals for up to 12 horses.

Call (800) 444-7275 for campground reservation information. Reservations must be made at least 48 hours in advance.

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Supported by the Mount Tamalpais Interpretive Association, most interpretive programs are conducted by volunteer docents. The visitor center offers displays and merchandise.

Free guided hikes include moonlight hikes and Wednesday Night hikes. Seasonal special hikes are also scheduled, such as the wildflower hike.

Free astronomy programs take place at the Mountain Theater on Saturday evenings from April through October. Families can enjoy multimedia programs on astronomy and the space sciences. Following each program, members of the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers allow visitors to use their telescopes for stargazing.

Visit www.mttam.net for updates and details on events and hiking.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- The accessible half-mile Verna Dunshee Trail at East Peak has fantastic bay views. Accessible tables, restrooms and drinking fountains are nearby.
- Spectacular vistas may also be seen from an accessible .4-mile portion of the Old Mine Trail from Pantoll Station and .25 miles of the McKennan Trail.
- An accessible campsite, restroom and parking are available at Pantoll Station.
- Cabin #1 and campsite #7 at Steep Ravine are both accessible.
- The Mountain Theater has a wheelchair platform on the right side of the theater.
- The Mountain Play Association offers signed performances and descriptive services during the first three play performances each season. For more information, call the Mountain Play Association at (415) 383-1100.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Camping and fires are permitted only in designated areas.
- Observe park hours, which vary by season.
- Dogs are not allowed on trails, on fire roads or in undeveloped areas. Dogs are permitted on leash in the picnic areas and campgrounds, except in the Environmental Campground. Dogs must be confined to a vehicle or tent at night.
- Horses are allowed only on fire roads and designated (posted) hiking trails.
- Lock your car and take your valuables with you.
- Learn to identify poison oak. Be alert for rattlesnakes, mountain lions and ticks.
- All park resources are protected by law.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

Angel Island State Park

In San Francisco Bay.
Ferries from Tiburon/Vallejo/San Francisco.
(415) 897-0715

China Camp State Park

Four miles east of San Rafael on San Pedro Rd
(415) 456-0766

Samuel P. Taylor State Park

15 miles west of San Rafael
on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.
(415) 488-9897

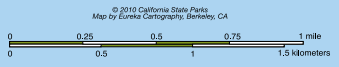


Mount Tamalpais State Park



- Legend**
- Major Road
 - Paved Road
 - Fire Road: Hiking, Horse and Bicycle
 - Trail: Hiking
 - Trail: Hiking and Horse
 - Trail: Hiking, Horse and Bicycle
 - Accessible Trail (Hiking Only)
 - Accessible Feature
 - Bridge
 - Campground
 - Drinking Water
 - Environmental Campground
 - Exhibit
 - Group Campground
 - Horse Campground
 - Locked Gate
 - Parking
 - Picnic Area
 - Ranger Station
 - Restrooms
 - Spring
 - Viewpoint

This park is supported in part through the
 Mt. Tamalpais Interpretive Association
 P. O. Box 3318, San Rafael, CA 94912
 (415) 258-2410 • www.mttam.net



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