

Travel Regions: Central Coast, Central Valley, San Francisco-Bay Area

## Discover Easy Hikes in Northern California State Parks

Explore the beauty of State Parks in northern California via some easy hikes.

Visitors can discover trails and pathways through beaches, hills, and alongside rivers. It's a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with friends and family and get away from city and cement. (To ensure your hike is enjoyable, it's important to wear proper shoes, fit for hiking, wear a hat for sun protection, and bring drinking water. In summertime, an early morning start offers hikers both cooler temperatures and a better chance of seeing wildlife. For a safe and pleasant outing, be sure to check the weather forecast.)

Here are some ideas for easy hike locations:

**CASWELL MEMORIAL STATE PARK (SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY)** offers visitors a leisurely ramble along the Stanislaus River. Various trail loops allow walks from .5 to 2.5 miles over relatively level terrain. The stately Valley Oaks that tower over the trails once sheltered the Yokut people, and welcomed the first European explorers with a familiar sight, so like the mighty white oaks of their homelands. Take the Austin Rd. exit west from Highway. 99 at Manteca and continue seven miles until the road ends at the park entrance.

Call (209) 599-3810 for more information. The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



**PACHECO STATE PARK (MERCED COUNTY)** is a great destination for hikers. The trail up to Spike's Peak (2.5 miles) offers stunning views. Returning by way of the Pig Pond Trail takes hikers near the old adobe ruins of the original

San Luis Gonzaga rancho, and a cowboy's line shack from the Miller & Lux era. Pacheco State Park is located between Los Baños and Gilroy on Highway 152 at Pacheco Pass. Take the Dinosaur Point Road exit south from the highway and turn right almost immediately at the park sign.

For information call (209) 826-6283.

**HENRY W. COE STATE PARK** (SANTA CLARA COUNTY) has earned its reputation for steep terrain, but the park also features some delightful but less physically demanding trails. A good example is the Forest Trail – Springs Trail loop which makes a leisurely walk of about 2-3 hours along oak-studded ridges and through mixed woodlands. A self-guiding trail brochure available at the park headquarters' Visitor Center introduces the shrubs and trees to be found along the way. Take East Dunne Avenue from Hwy. 101 in Morgan Hill; the road goes directly into the park after a winding climb of about 30 minutes. Call (408) 779-2728 for more information; during the winter the visitor center is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

From Henry Coe's new Hunting Hollow entrance east of Gilroy, the Hunting Hollow Trail follows a little creek bed with a lovely stand of old Sycamores. Take Leavesley Road east from Hwy. 101 in Gilroy, turning left (north) on New Avenue, and east again on Roop Road. Roop turns into the old Gilroy Hot Springs Road. Continue on Gilroy Hot Springs Rd.; the Hunting Hollow entrance will be on your right, 3.3 miles beyond the sign for the Coyote Lake turnoff. Call (408) 779-2728 for more information. The park is a Watchable Wildlife site. 

**MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK** (CONTRA COSTA COUNTY) has several trailheads at a variety of elevations that offer hiking opportunities, varying from easy walking to moderate to strenuous.

Visitors' first stop should be the Summit Visitor Center where hikers can get an orientation of the park and detailed information about the trails. Maps are available at a nominal fee. (The visitor center is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.)

Just below the Visitor Center, the Fire Interpretive Trail offers a short, easy hike. It circles the summit and is a short loop, approximately 7/8 miles, that features dramatic views of the park and surrounding Bay Area. The Juniper Trail is also accessible from Summit Road and is approximately three miles long. It also affords great views of the surrounding countryside.

A different kind of hike is at Curry Canyon Trail off of South Gate Road. It starts out at a lower elevation and follows a fire road into Curry Canyon on the east side of the park. The trail includes sections of a riparian corridor.

For more information, call the park at (925) 837-0904. The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



**CHINA CAMP STATE PARK** (MARIN COUNTY) has many trails, but it is one of the only parks with multi-use single-track trails. The presence of bicycles and horses may be disconcerting to new hikers looking for more solitude. There is, however, a short 3/4 mile flat, loop walk called the Turtle Back Nature Trail that is open only to foot traffic. The trail skirts the edge of an old island on the shore of San Pablo Bay. Today, pickleweed marsh has replaced open waters and the trail gives a close-up view of the salt marshes that harbor such endangered species as the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse and the Clapper Rail, while the upland side of the trail reveals oaks, bays and grassland communities. For more information, call the park at (415) 456-0766 or (415) 893-1580.

**MOUNT TAMALPAIS STATE PARK** (MARIN COUNTY) has several opportunities for easy loop trails. The most spectacular loop is the Verna Dunshee Trail on the East Peak of the mountain. It is a 3/4 mile loop that circles

the 2,571 foot summit and offers unparalleled views of the San Francisco Bay region. It is well worth the drive to the top of the mountain.

There are other loop trails in the 2-4 mile range starting from the Pantoll or Rock Spring trailheads. For more information, call the park at (415) 388-2070 or (415) 258-2410. The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



**TOMALES BAY STATE PARK** (MARIN COUNTY) has a splendid trail from Heart's Desire Beach to Indian Beach that can be done in a one mile loop. For more information, call the park at (415) 669-1140.

For more information about California State Parks and the annual pass, visit the website at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

# # #