

# Sonoma Mountain Journal

Volume 17, no. 1

December, 2017

*This year's Journal highlights the stories and effects of the 2017 wildfires on Sonoma Mountain*

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The first peoples of southern Sonoma county, the Coast Miwok, placed *oona-pa'is* — Sonoma Mountain — at the center of the world, imagining its summit as an island in the primordial ocean at the beginning of time.

Geologists tell a similar story —that Sonoma Mountain's layers of volcanic and sedimentary rock, pushed upward by tectonic forces, rose from the depths of a shallow sea.



**The mission of Sonoma Mountain Preservation is to preserve the mountain's scenic, agricultural and natural resources; expand recreational opportunities there; and provide a forum for constructive discussion of issues relating to the mountain.**

## DEVASTATION, REFUGE & HEALING ON THE MOUNTAIN

Arthur Dawson

On the night of October 8<sup>th</sup>, a fire started in the Mayacamas, just three miles northeast of downtown Glen Ellen and the base of Sonoma Mountain. Pushed by ferocious winds, the blaze swept southwest, consuming homes on Nuns Canyon, Dunbar, Henno and Warm Springs Roads. My own home was among those lost. When the firestorm reached O'Donnell Lane, next to Sonoma Creek, the winds were strong enough to move several cars. No one witnessed it, but such a feat would have required tornado-force winds.

After crossing the creek, the fire raced up the lower slopes of the mountain, igniting homes just above central Glen Ellen and threatening Jack London State Park and the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). That same night, the Adobe Fire (which later merged with the Nuns Fire) burned through the edge of Kenwood and up the east slope of Bennett Mountain. Jumping Bennett Valley Road the next day, it climbed up Sonoma Mountain and reached the edge of the North Slope Regional Park. Another fire, just south of Grange Road, burned to the edge of Crane Canyon Regional Park. Far to the south, a fourth fire blackened Sears Point, where the Sonoma Mountains touch San Pablo Bay.

Lives and hundreds of homes were tragically lost in these fires, which covered about 50,000 acres. Other fires blackened an additional 50,000 acres of the county. In the face of this devastation, it is striking how much of the mountain was spared (map, page X). Flames licked at the base of Sonoma Mountain but never spread into the SDC or Sobre Vista. Great credit for this goes to the professional firefighters and

residents who checked the fire's advance (see Steve Lee's account on page 5).

Like those firefighters, the mountain itself played a protective role. It shielded Petaluma from blunt force of the winds which drove the fire in its early days. It also served as a refuge for animals escaping the conflagration. Nancy Kirwan, who lives near Carriger Creek, reports that the coyote population has gone up in her neighborhood—their howling serenades, which used to happen occasionally, are now a nightly occurrence.

Likewise, another resident noticed a marked increase in owl calls in her area. Another saw unusually large flocks of Band-Tailed Pigeons roaming the lower flanks of the mountain. Golden-Crowned Kinglets, which typically inhabit conifer forests in the Mayacamas and Annadel, were spotted at Sobre Vista after the fire. Driving Sonoma Mountain Road in late October, I noticed that where you once would have seen six or eight small birds perched on the utility lines between two poles, there were now dozens and dozens of them.

The places where those animals lived, and fled from, also provided our human community with open space, recreation, natural beauty and relief from the busy world. Now burned, these places have not only become strange and unfamiliar but many are officially "off limits" and inaccessible too. Glen Ellen's Sonoma Valley Regional Park presents a scarcely recognizable black and white version of its former self, fallen leaves adding sepia on top of scorched and blackened grasses. Its closure leaves a hole in our community

*Continued on page 4*

## Letter from the Chair



### 2018: THE YEAR OF SONOMA MOUNTAIN

Meg Beeler

We're preparing this Journal a few weeks after our fires.

For all of us, it's a challenge to step aside from the fire losses and keep going. Grief and devastation face us at every turn. Our Vice-Chair Arthur Dawson, who lost his home in Glen Ellen, models #SonomaStrong: he thanks everyone he sees for the love and support that surround him and his family, despite minute-by-minute adjustment to what is, and what is no longer.

Focusing on how Sonoma Mountain was affected by the fires, how individual heroes stepped up to help save neighborhoods and the whole mountain, and what lessons we might find for the ecosystem seemed natural. Yet it is hard to make sense of things. We see pathways—where the fires swept through—but no clear reasons why one house burned and another still stands. As the ashes rained down, I thought of them as pieces of lives and memories spreading across the land.

Our gratitude that the mountain was relatively unscathed knows no bounds. Sonoma Mountain's public open spaces, from Jack London SHP to Crane Creek Regional Park, were left intact. It is possible that the mountain's height, and western flank of grasslands, protected Petaluma from the fires.

Our mountain stands, vibrant and alive. We humans stand too, full of resiliency as we face transformation and begin rebuilding.

As work has progressed on *Where the World Begins: Sonoma Mountain in Stories and Images*—to be published in the fall of 2018 (see sidebar)—a wonderful idea emerged.

To build public focus, engagement, and interest in the mountain, we're naming 2018 the **Year of Sonoma Mountain**. We're working with our many open space, parks, and arts partners to plan special Sonoma Mountain-focused events for 2018. With these joint events, we will raise awareness of the beauty and diversity of our mountain; help people develop a deeper connection to and sense of place; and encourage people to explore the treasure and jewel of a mountain that is our most prominent landmark. Come play on the mountain!

#### Welcome Our New Secretary

Nancy Kirwan, who grew up spending her summers on the mountain and recently moved back, has graciously agreed to become our new Board Secretary. Her energy and curiosity are wonderful additions. Welcome, Nancy!

#### We Need Your Help!

More than a quarter-million people live within a dozen miles of Sonoma Mountain. Urban residents of Petaluma, Sonoma, Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa see the mountain daily. We want to help them deepen their connection. You can help by using your donation envelope or PayPal on our website ([link](#)):

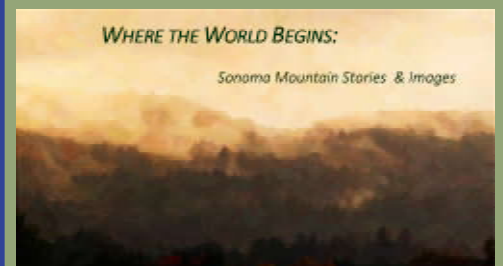
- Order copies of the book in advance, \$35 per copy.
- Make a special donation for the book (\$100 or more includes a copy).
- Include your regular donation to SMP so we can carry on the rest of our work advocating for the mountain.

## A Book for the Mountain

With compelling photographs and text, ***Where the World Begins: Sonoma Mountain Stories & Images*** will explore and celebrate the natural and cultural value of Sonoma Mountain and its unique place in the landscape of Sonoma County.

Gathering together diverse voices and perspectives from the past and present, *Where the World Begins* will present the mountain through a variety of lenses, including: First Peoples; pioneer history; geology; water; habitats and ecosystems; conservation and preservation; visionaries, writers and artists associated with the mountain; and the future.

The book and related events during the Year of Sonoma Mountain will “bring the mountain to the people,” fostering greater public awareness, appreciation and stewardship of the mountain.



Contributors will include regionally and nationally-known writers Kenneth Brower, Greg Sarris, Rebecca Lawton Tracy Salcedo and Arthur Dawson, who will be the primary author.

Photographers include Scott Hess, well known for his Sonoma County landscapes and Sonoma Mountain resident Ed Cooper, who has a national reputation for his mountain photos from around the world.

Publication Date: Fall 2018. \$35

# WILL LAFFERTY BE THERE WHEN WE GET THERE?

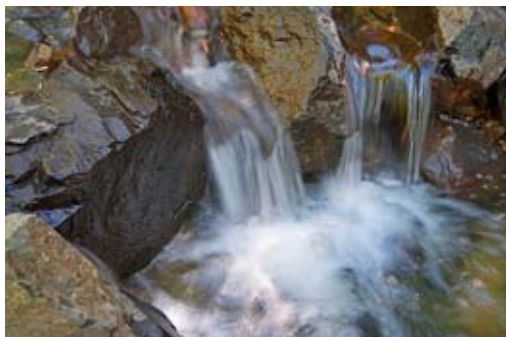
Matt McGuire  
Friends of Lafferty Park

The almost three-decade effort to open Petaluma's Lafferty Ranch may actually come to fruition in our lifetimes, some of us proponents are finally beginning to believe.

The arduous, painstaking mediation between the Friends of Lafferty Park, the City of Petaluma and the adjacent neighbors appear to be bearing fruit. The negotiations have always centered around the level of access and the protection of the natural resources. After it was agreed by the parties to hire a trails expert and a biologist to review the property, a draft usage plan was created. The plan was the subject of much back and forth negotiations but may be nearing an agreeable form for all.

The other main issue has been the timing and phasing of public access. This too appears to be nearing an agreeable form.

When I wrote this, massive fires were burning on the back side of Sonoma Mountain. The catastrophic damage done to large swaths of Santa Rosa have put a temporary hold on the mediation, just as we were approaching the final stages.



Copeland Creek

Scott Hess

Thankfully, the fires never climbed over the ridge to destroy our mountaintop jewel; Lafferty Ranch survived intact. With the delay, the mediation will take a little longer to resolve. Will the parties finally, finally reach an agreement on access and timing so that the public can enjoy Lafferty at long last?

We hope and pray that we will have a positive answer to this question by the time the next edition of the Journal is out.

pressures of development were alarming. In the 1993 Pat and local activists formed Sonoma Mountain Preservation(SMP). Pat served on its board for over 20 years, working tirelessly to achieve the goal of preserving what was special about the mountain. Typically, she shunned the presidency, but as secretary organized the agenda and kept the group's focus on the preservation of agricultural land, open space and trails. Pat rode the mountain on



Pat Eliot on the mountain

Eliot Family

## TRIBUTES

### Pat Eliot

SMP Founder

A year ago we lost a woman whose enduring passion to preserve Sonoma Mountain began when she took a job at the Jack London Guest ranch run by the London family during WWII. She brought along her horse and explored the Mountain for several summers.

Patricia Peters Eliot was 7 when her family came to California. She led a full and adventurous life with her husband Ted, a foreign service officer. They were posted in Sri Lanka, Germany, the Soviet Union and Iran with several years of residence in Washington DC. There, with four small children at home, Pat earned a concurrent Bachelor's and Master's degrees in education at American University and taught in challenging schools in the District. Their last stop was in Kabul where Ted served as Ambassador in the 1970's. Here Pat honed the diplomatic skills valuable when working in organizations and bureaucracies and she led and set goals for many!

In their mid sixties, Pat and Ted built a home high on Sonoma Mountain. The mountain had much changed. The

her quarterhorse D2 until her 87<sup>th</sup> year. SMP led the effort to transfer the upper 600 acres of the Sonoma Developmental Center to State Parks, a task that took seven years. An ordinance shaped to protect the view shed of the mountain was adopted by the County supervisors. It now also protects Taylor Mountain and the Mayacamas Mountains that frame Sonoma Valley.

The work of the SMP continues, with plans to declare 2018 "The Year of the Mountain", and with the publication of a book about this place that serves as a backdrop for 250,000 people. Both the book and the activities next year will serve as a tribute to Pat Eliot.

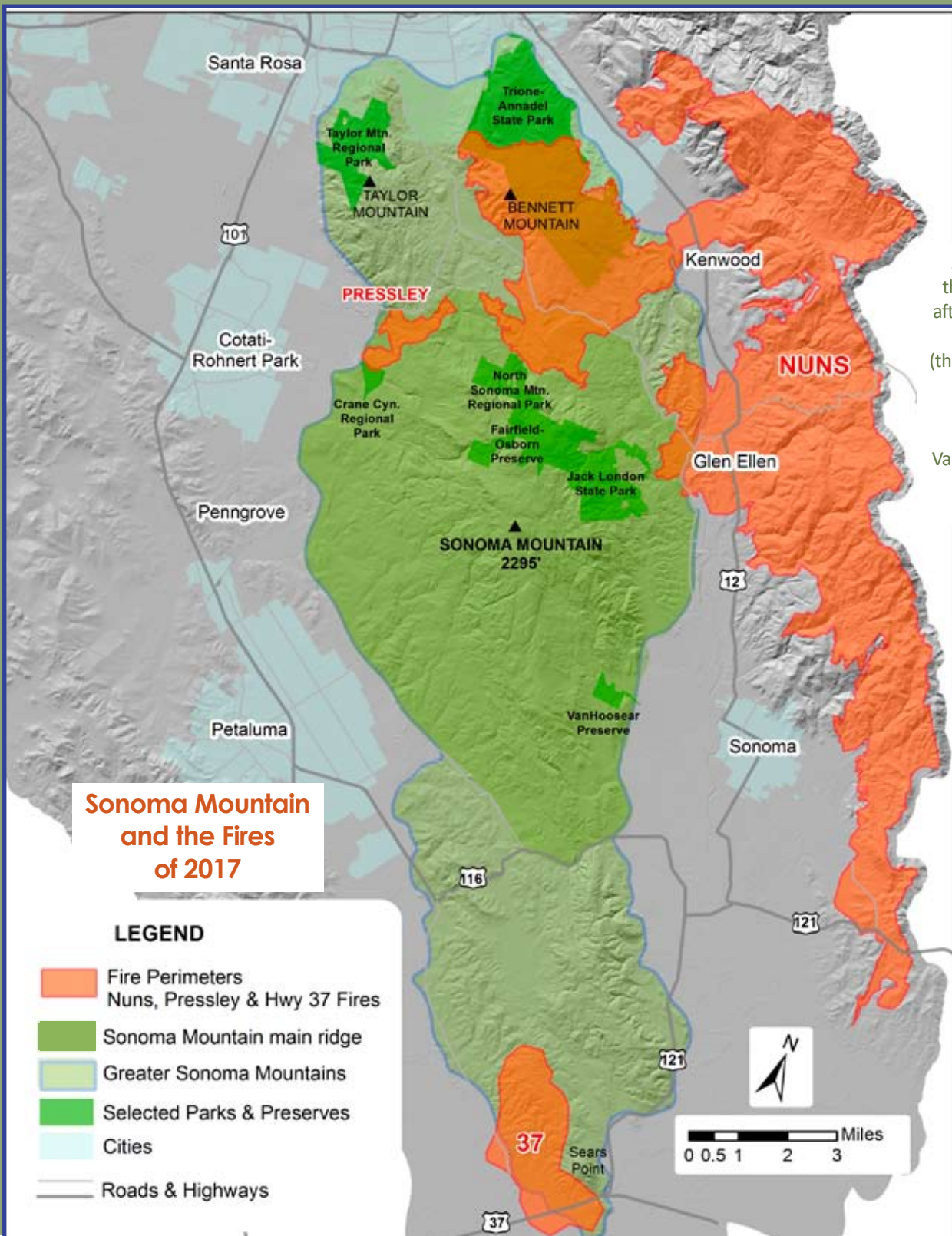
—Mickey Cooke

**John Barinaga:** Another of SMP's founding and long-time members, John Barinaga, passed away in April, 2017. John was a leader in opposition to the Galvin Ranch, a Sonoma Mountain ridge-top development proposed in 1996. Thirty-four homes would have been visible from both Petaluma and Sonoma, requiring amendment of the County General Plan. Thanks to John and many others, the development was rejected. John was a curious person who always had a twinkle in his eye. We miss him.



Lafferty Ranch from Petaluma.

Scott Hess



**Sonoma Mountain and the Fires of 2017**

**LEGEND**

- Fire Perimeters  
Nuns, Pressley & Hwy 37 Fires
- Sonoma Mountain main ridge
- Greater Sonoma Mountains
- Selected Parks & Preserves
- Cities
- Roads & Highways

All the parks shown on this map have re-opened after the fires and are again welcoming visitors. (though portions of Annadel remain closed.)

Fairfield Osborn and VanHoosear Preserves offer limited public access.

CARTOGRAPHY by Arthur Dawson  
Baseline Consulting, Glen Ellen, CA  
FIRE PERIMETERS courtesy of CALFIRE  
BASE MAP courtesy of Sonoma County  
2013 LIDAR coverage

**Devastation, Refuge & Healing**

*Continued from page 1*

and compounds our personal losses from the fire.

The literature on recovering from trauma—and virtually everyone in the county has suffered it at some level—recommends seeking out the familiar. The

mountain offers us a place that *hasn't* changed. Driving up to Jack London State Park, the smell of wet black ash gives way to the sweet aroma of oak and bay leaves melting back into the earth; fire-gutted homes are replaced by buildings which have stood for 135 years; and in the place of brown leaves and dead trees are green oaks, madrone and maple, ranks of

Douglas fir and redwood groves. As things were, they still are. The well-trod paths that welcome us into autumn woods remain shady and cool.

When the fires of 2017 singed its edges, Sonoma Mountain provided shelter and safe haven. Now that those fires have passed into memory, it offers a place for us to heal from the burn as well.

## FIGHTING THE FIRE: A First-hand Account

Steve Lee

*NOTE: Steve lives on a knoll at the foot of Sonoma Mountain, across from Jack London Village and above Arnold Drive*

Up until about 4 a.m., when my family evacuated, fire personnel were not doing much to halt the fire's advance. They were simply trying to save lives and protect structures where they could. The winds were just too strong.

But just before dawn, they made their first attempt to stop the advance of the flank of the fire that blew over Warm Springs Road and through Glen Ellen. There's a

lot of open grass and grazing land on the properties more or less across from Jack London Village, on what is called Meadow Lane. That's where they put up a fight, using multiple trucks and a bulldozer.

Thankfully, the fierce winds started to drop off. As dawn broke, I was by myself running the tractor and had hoses ready; there were still embers landing on our property. I was able to get them out and kept my eyes on the flames visible through the trees below as they approached Asbury Creek.

The fire crews moved on to the next big fight, leaving open fires burning. I watched them spread into the creek in a few places. When they started to flare up in

the jumbled overgrowth, I got buckets, shovels and a chainsaw. Luckily, my brother, nephew and his friends showed up just then, and we all went down there together and managed to tamp down the flames. They were over 10-feet high in places!

Another flare-up happened later that morning and the fire started raging uphill toward Jack London Park. One flank headed to the creek further upstream in a 250-yard line of flames fed by wind gusts. A friend, John Powell, John's tenant and I fought that for an hour and stopped it just before it reached the overgrowth of the creek canyon.

All day and night and throughout the next day, me and a few neighbors—Will Hopper, Scott Lindquist, Matt Smith, Neil Shepherd and others—assisted by fire crews hailed down on Arnold Drive at three critical times, kept the fire from crossing Asbury Creek canyon. Had it crossed the canyon it would have entered the never-burned SDC lands and spread unabated up Sonoma Mountain and across to the communities of Morningside, Sobre Vista and Diamond A.

Another flank of the fire came at us from the east as it burned through the Regional Park. This was mostly halted before Arnold Drive, but it did jump the road right below us, between the two bridges, and burned to Sonoma Creek.

It jumped the creek in one place closer to the SDC campus and started heading uphill into the open space. Eldridge Fire got that part under control before it got too high on the hill. That was stressing me out for a while! That was the furthest south it got on Sonoma Mountain.

*website*

*adapted from an article in the Kenwood Press by Shannon Lee*

### Join Us in 2018!

For our quarterly meetings on January 24; April 25; July 25 & October 24, 1:30 to 3:30, at the Sonoma Ecology Center, Sonoma Developmental Center campus. Guest speakers in 2018 include Bay Area Ridge Trail folks and Quinton Martins on the Mountain Lion Project. (Call 996-9967 for directions)

### Donate

P.O. Box 1772, Glen Ellen, CA 1772  
[www.sonomamountain.org](http://www.sonomamountain.org). (Paypal/credit card)

### Keep Up with Issues and Events

SMP on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sonomamountain](https://www.facebook.com/sonomamountain)

Development Issues on the radar: [www.votma.org/pub/htdocs/issues.html](http://www.votma.org/pub/htdocs/issues.html)

Map of structures destroyed in the 2017 fires: <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Public-Safety/Press-Releases/Interactive-Map-of-Structures-Impacted/>



**SMP's current board**, from left: Meg Beeler, chair; Arthur Dawson, Vice-Chair; Nancy Kirwan, Secretary; Jack Nisson, Treasurer.

## THE EVILS IN THE HILLS

John Sheehy

Frank Burton, who settled at the northwestern foot of Sonoma Mountain in the 1850s, claimed that the trout in nearby Copeland Creek ran so thick he could reach in and catch them by hand. Copeland Creek's abundance of fish and year-round fresh water made it a valuable resource for Yankee pioneers like Burton, but the creek also had a checkered reputation for infidelity. In stormy conditions Copeland Creek was known to jump watersheds, venturing from its usual streambed in the Russian River watershed to the nearby Petaluma River watershed, where it contributed to the periodic flooding of Petaluma.

Calls for imposing flood control on the wayward creek began over a century ago with the *Petaluma Courier's* plea to "remedy the evils in the hills." Those calls were raised again this past winter, after Copeland Creek jumped its banks along Lichau Road in Penngrove, spilling into an already-flooded Petaluma. As in the past, they were met with concerns over regulations, private property rights, and questions about where the money would come from.

Copeland Creek originates from Elphic Spring near the summit of Sonoma Mountain, naturally flowing onto the Santa Rosa Plain at the southern edge of the Russian River watershed. While winter storms annually drop an average 23 inches of rain on the plain, the top of Sonoma Mountain, its 2,464-foot elevation literally scraping the rain from passing storm clouds, averages 50 inches. Prior to the 1870s, rainwater flowed down Copeland Creek's bed of basaltic armor and fanned out into a large seasonal lake across parts of current day Cotati and Rohnert Park, providing a habitat for egrets, herons, ducks, amphibians, and trout.

The increasing development of farms on the plain in the 1870s led to the land reclamation of Copeland Creek's seasonal wetlands. A nine-mile channel was

constructed to connect the creek with the main stem of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, ultimately feeding the creek into the Russian River. But the collection of sediment and storm debris that built up during the winter hindered the channel's flood control function, contributing to Copeland Creek's inclination to jump into the nearby Petaluma watershed, where it pushed debris and sediment to the Petaluma River, impeding riverboat navigation and exasperating flood conditions in Petaluma. The channeling also appears to have brought about a steep decline of trout in the creek.

In 1872, Copeland Creek became a primary water source for Petaluma, along with two other year-round creeks that flowed down Sonoma Mountain's west slope, Adobe Creek and Lynch Creek. A diversionary dam was built midway up Copeland Creek that piped roughly half of the creek's stream flow to Petaluma reservoirs. Even so, come winter Copeland Creek failed to change its evil ways. State engineer reports in 1896 and 1902 called for remedies for shoring up its banks, but ranch owners responded by threatening the city of Petaluma with trespassing lawsuits.

In 1914, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers recommended the construction of a restraining wall on the creek, but the Cotati Land Company, a large landholder in the southern Santa Rosa Plain, sued Petaluma, arguing that such a wall would result in flooding their farmland. Heavy rainfalls in the late 1920s brought repeated flooding to the chicken ranchers of both Petaluma and Cotati. Citizen petitions for flood control were met with a deaf ear by the Petaluma City Council.

New calls by Petalumans this past summer were met with the usual hurdles of private property concerns, state and federal regulations, funding sources, and the creek's protected habitat for threatened steelhead trout. Not so long ago they ran so thick as to be caught by hand.



Sonoma County Regional Parks

## STROLLING IN THE PARK: Walks at Crane Creek

Arthur Dawson

With its rolling landscape of oaks and grassland bordering Crane Creek, Crane Creek Regional Park offers a variety of leisurely walks. You can ramble along the Creek Trail accompanied by the sound of flowing water or make the brief climb to an expansive view of Taylor Mountain and the Cotati Plain at the top of the Sunset Trail.

One of the park's pleasures is to stroll with no particular destination, choosing your path at each trail junction as you go. There are at least a half-dozen loops within park's five miles of trail. Whenever you decide to return, the parking lot is never much more than a mile away.

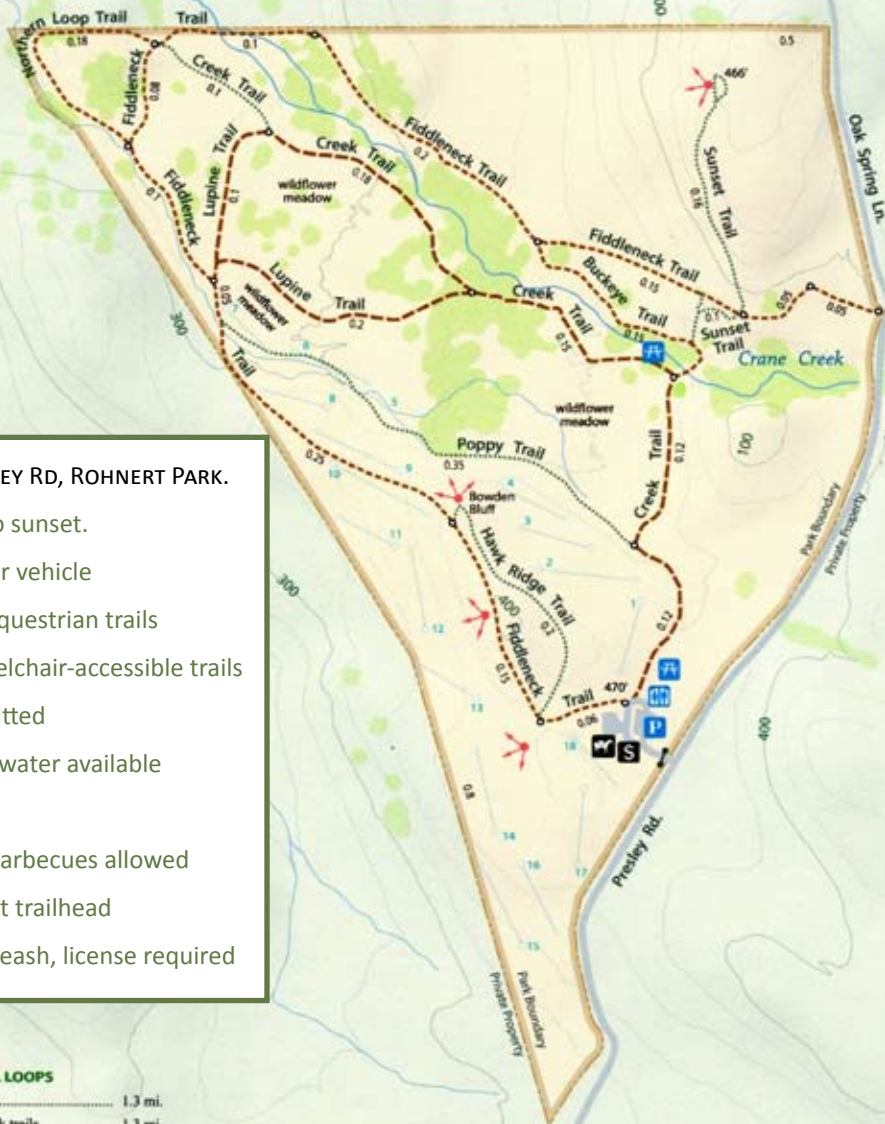
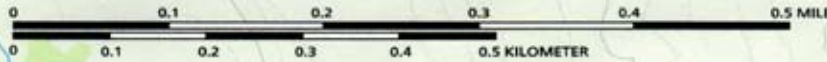
The Pressley fire (page 4) touched the northern edge of Crane Canyon Park. On the Sunset and Fiddleneck trails you will find blackened grassland and some oak and bay trees which also burned. Even so, life is returning full force—watered by the early rains, grass is sprouting and among its green blades, tree frogs are already starting to sing!



Arthur Dawson



# Crane Creek Regional Park



- COMPRESSED GRAVEL TREAD WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE MULTI-USE TRAIL
- MULTI-USE TRAIL
- HIKING TRAIL
- SERVICE ROAD (RESTRICTED ACCESS)
- FEE STATION
- PARKING
- PARKING (ADA ACCESSIBLE)
- RESTROOM
- PICNIC TABLES
- EQUESTRIAN STAGING
- GATE
- VISTA POINT
- DISTANCE (MILES)
- DISC GOLF COURSE BASKET
- TRAILS SHOWN IN ELEVATION PROFILE
- OAK WOODLANDS
- CHAPARRAL OR SCRUB
- GRASSLAND
- REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

5000 PRESSLEY RD, ROHNERT PARK.

Hours: 7AM to sunset.

Parking: \$7 per vehicle

- Walking & equestrian trails
- Gravel, wheelchair-accessible trails
- Biking permitted
- No drinking water available
- Picnic tables
- No fires or barbecues allowed
- Restrooms at trailhead
- Dogs: on 6' leash, license required

**RECOMMENDED TRAIL LOOPS**

|                                 |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Fiddleneck-Creek trails         | 1.3 mi. |
| Fiddleneck-Buckeye-Creek trails | 1.3 mi. |
| Creek-Poppy-Fiddleneck trails   | 0.8 mi. |
| Creek-Lupine-Fiddleneck trails  | 1.1 mi. |
| Fiddleneck-Hawk Ridge trails    | 0.5 mi. |

This map is provided as a guide within the park. Reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the map and data provided. The positional accuracy of the data is approximate and not intended to represent map accuracy from a published record survey. THE MAP AND ASSOCIATED DATA ARE PROVIDED WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, either expressed or implied, including but not limited to, the implied warranties of merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose. For detailed and updated information about accessibility of recreational opportunities or any other park information contact Sonoma County Regional Parks at (707) 865-2941.

Map courtesy of Sonoma County Regional Parks



Sonoma Mountain Preservation

P.O. Box 1772  
Glen Ellen, CA 95442

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