

Sonoma Mountain Journal

Volume 21, No. 1

December 2021

This is the only time of year we ask directly for donations. We especially want to see our 6th grade "Write Across the Mountain" program (see more about it in the Journal) expand to more schools. [Help us make that happen!](#)

This year's Journal highlights education as part of the legacy and future of Sonoma Mountain

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Hike the Umbrella Tree

The native people 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

Our mission is to preserve the Sonoma Mountains' scenic, agricultural, and natural resources by cultivating a sense of place, engaging people in the landscape, and inspiring them

"THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN" BRINGING SONOMA MOUNTAIN TO THE CLASSROOM

Arthur Dawson

The idea first appeared as an image of pieces of paper carried on the wind like a flock of birds, flying west over the top of Sonoma Mountain. Slowly they fluttered down into a schoolyard on the far side. Covered with poems and letters written by Sonoma Valley students, the messages expressed how the mountain lived in their experiences and imaginations. As their fellow students on "the other side" picked them up and read them, they began to see and appreciate a familiar landmark through another perspective. And that experience opened the door to a world of bigger possibilities.

At the time, Tony Passantino, Education Program Manager for Sonoma Ecology Center (SEC), and I had been brainstorming ways to bring a deeper sense of place into SEC's Environmental Education program. We were also interested in exploring a more formal collaboration between SEC and Sonoma Mountain Preservation (SMP). The ideas had been germinating, at a leisurely pace, for a couple years when the pandemic hit. Suddenly the whole world tipped in a strange and unsettling direction.

In January, Tony arranged a one-class pilot with Kenwood School sixth graders. SEC had taught environmental education there for years; likewise, I'd taught poetry at Kenwood through California Poets in the Schools for a decade and worked with the sixth graders just a year before. They were familiar with the creative writing process and ready to roll on our first and only pilot lesson (you can read some of their work on page 6).

From there, Tony and I began developing a full program built on the foundation SEC had already established in the schools. SMP is funding 50% of the program's first year, with the goal of reaching ten classrooms around the mountain. Sonoma Ecology Center is matching the remaining half from other sources. Each sixth-grade classroom will receive several in-class sessions and a field trip to the mountain.

Meanwhile, the increasing number and intensity of heat waves, wildfires, hurricanes, and floods are giving everyone a growing sense of urgency about climate change. There's a lot of uncertainty about the future and messages circulating in the media promote the idea that humanity may not really have a future. The younger generation, in particular, is concerned about what this bodes for their personal lives as they get older. Sadly, many young adults are deciding not to have kids because they don't want to bring them into such a world.

Wildfires are one of the most tangible effects of climate change in Sonoma County. A Community Foundation survey found that over half (58%) of middle schoolers feel "depressed, stressed or anxious" in the aftermath of recent fires and reported that those feelings make it hard to do their best at school. The long-term traumas resulting from multiple catastrophic events in recent years are an obstacle to living full and rewarding lives.

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Letter from the Chair



WHAT DOES THE MOUNTAIN TEACH US?

Meg Beeler

Publishing our award-winning book has deepened our awareness of this mountain that renews and regenerates us with wild open spaces and a hundred miles of trails. Just as fungal networks communicate with and across tree root systems, so do humans and animals connect, communicate, and travel across and around the mountain in our midst.

If you were lucky enough to grow up here or near another other wild place, the joys of exploring, discovery, and roaming free are well known to you. Images of that known world ground you: the old oak you climbed, the creek where you found polliwogs, a memory of sliding down a muddy trail after heavy rain, the stories you invented for yourself—all are part of the fabric of the life you live as an adult.

When I moved to Sonoma Mountain the year after the 2006 flood, I heard from Arthur Dawson about the Grandmother Redwood. Since there were no printed trail maps or markers then (!) my husband and I had only general directions. We began hiking at Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) and got as far as Fern Lake. The one other person we passed told us which trail to follow. Finding the Grandmother this way, as if we were early explorers, made us proud. Seeing her contorted limbs and the imprint of a chain around her middle taught us a lot about deforestation: she was the anchor as they felled surrounding trees, and she was left only because her lumber was “less valuable.” It’s intimacies like these that create relationship with the mountain and her history.

Meadows where *Calochortus luteus*—yellow Mariposa lily—bloom on Sonoma Mountain feel like a secret; knowledge I have only because I walk the mountain often. I’ve learned that land is like a friend: taking the time to know it, your life is enriched and expanded.

SMP aims to create and share these kinds of experiences in all we do. If you love the place you live, you’ll take care of it! In practical ways, you’ll support open spaces because they are carbon sinks that store carbon; they protect wildlife corridors (you might get to see a bear!); they give humans respite from noise,

obligations, Zoom, and stress; they help us regenerate; and they help us feel hopeful, connected and rooted, where we are.

The reality that 58% of the kids in Sonoma County report feeling anxious and stressed (findings from a Community Foundation study) propels us to do even more. The education program we’ve been dreaming up for the last few years (see separate article)—combining connections with and across the mountain with hopeful climate/science education—is right on the mark!

SMP Advocacy in 2021

Lafferty Ranch is a beautiful 270-acre parcel on the mountain’s west side, encompassing the headwaters of Adobe Creek but with few publicly accessible trails. SMP has supported the opening of a park there for years. We’re thrilled that the city of **Petaluma** plans to move forward, finally, with trail planning and guided explorations. New Board member Larry Modell is our go-to.

Continuing our 20-year involvement with **Eldridge** (formerly the Sonoma Developmental Center), we are advocating: a 725-acre transfer to Jack London State Park and Sonoma County Regional Parks; creek setbacks; protection of the wildlife corridor running through the property; and development that honors the character of Glen Ellen. We have recently commented on and spoken at community meetings about the three “alternatives.” Board member Tracy Salcedo writes about the process in the *Kenwood Press* and focuses on Eldridge for SMP.

In 2021, we also focused on the **Vital Lands Initiative** (Board member Teri Shore); the **Bay Area Ridge Trail** (Board member David Hansen); the proposed expansion and development of the 820-acre **North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve** (Board members read and commented on the plans extensively); and working to get Permit Sonoma to more strongly enforce the **Scenic Guidelines** (multiple Board members).

22% of Sonoma Mountains lands are now protected, with over 100 miles of publicly accessible trails. See the updates to our website, sonomamountain.org, for links to trail maps and all these protected lands.



IPPY Pride

We were thrilled to receive an IPPY award this year for *Where the World Begins: Sonoma Mountain Stories and Images*—a Bronze Medal for Best Regional Nonfiction. Still on sale at Readers’ Books, local Glen Ellen wineries, and online: sonomamountain.org.

What You Can Do

Get up-to-date info about what's happening on the mountain through our monthly emails, new Instagram, and Facebook pages. Chime in on SDC alternatives. Hike. Fire-proof your bit of land.

Changes in our Board

We've recently welcomed Larry Modell from Petaluma to our board. We thank Board members Matt McGuire and John Sheehy for their years of support. We are actively seeking members with diverse backgrounds, passion for education, access to nature and experience with conservation, nonprofits, and/or policy issues.

SDC UPDATE

As we go to press, SMP is actively advocating for your engagement. Convincing our Sonoma County Supervisors about the need for more robust wildlife corridor and creek protection—which includes housing for fewer people—and the Valley's need for 75% workforce and low income housing (not 25% as has been proposed) is crucial, along with whatever other concerns you have. For talking points, <https://eldridgeforall.org/talking-points>

SMP, along with the Glen Ellen Forum, the North Sonoma Valley MAC, Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma Ecology Center, and lots of locals are creating a 4th alternative for the Board of Supervisors. We're lobbying for more time, an immediate transfer of the wildlife corridor lands, more affordable and less total housing, and lots more. A community meeting is planned for Jan 8. Save the date and do stay involved!

We're proud that we've stayed on top of so many issues, and of course encourage you to keep supporting us. You can donate through [Paypal](https://www.paypal.com) or mail your check to PO Box 1772 Glen Ellen, CA 95442.

Join Us in 2022!

Board Meetings:

Guest speakers deepen our knowledge of the mountain & we address local development challenges.

January 26, March 30, May 25, July 27, Sept 28, November 9:

(Wednesdays) **330 to 530 p.m.**

For link/location: baseline@vom.com or (707) 996-9967

Keep Up with Issues and Events:

Monthly newsletter sign up at www.sonomamountain.org

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SONOMA MOUNTAIN OLD SCHOOL

Tracy Salcedo

In the library at Dunbar Elementary School in Glen Ellen, old-time students captured in images dating back more than a century gaze sternly at their modern counterparts. They are silent, serious, and dressed funny, but they captivate today's scholars, who gaze back and wonder: Are they dead? Is that the old school? Why aren't they smiling? Why is nothing in color?

East-Side Schoolhouses

Today's Dunbar School is a tangible link to old-time schoolhouses on Sonoma Mountain, with historic records preserved onsite documenting connections that span decades. Dunbar, established in 1857 and touted as the second longest running school in the state of California, is the sole school remaining of the Dunbar Unified School District, which encompassed the Trinity School in the Mayacamas, the Los Guilicos School in what is now Kenwood, the Glen Ellen School at the foot of the mountain, Dunbar School (then located closer to the mouth of Nuns Canyon), and the Enterprise School, on Enterprise Road on the north slope of the mountain.

What was schooling like for scholars in those days? Records kept by teachers with meticulous handwriting and dating back to 1896 provide a glimpse. In these "Public School Registers," kept by Dunbar schoolteachers May White, Annie Dows, Edith Patterson, and others, lesson plans, attendance, honor rolls, records of suspensions and expulsions (none in those early years), and notes on students' performance are documented. The days were packed: Pupils spanning nine grades studied arithmetic, mental arithmetic, bookkeeping, and "number work"; reading, word analysis, language, spelling, grammar, composition, and penmanship; geography, civil government, physiology, history, and natural history; drawing and singing; morals and manners; rhetorical exercises; and, of course, "busy work."

Scholars were required to come to school with "clean hands and faces;" if sent to wash, they stayed 10 minutes after school. If caught snapping their fingers, punishment was writing "25 words," and in the back of the 1899-1900 record, the words "motion," "theater," and "perticular" are scrawled in progressively sloppier fashion. A pair of fourth graders were recommended for advancement to fifth grade "on condition of great improvement in arithmetic and deportment." A teacher also noted little Maud would perform better if she weren't deaf.

Herb Bruning, born in 1910, grew up on the Sonoma Mountain on his parents' Waldrue Resort, and attended the Enterprise School until it closed in 1924 due to lack of students. He transferred down to the Glen Ellen School on Williams Road, and told historian Bob Glotzbach, "I remember I got 'bummed up' at one of the teachers about something (I'm not sure what about) and told

continued on page 6

'THE SECOND-BEST DAY OF MY LIFE'

INTERVIEW WITH SUZANNE DECOURSEY

ARTHUR DAWSON

"We believe everyone should be environmentally ready," explains Suzanne DeCoursey of Sonoma State University's Center for Environmental Inquiry (CEI). "Not just biologists and scientists, but everyone." She has served as CEI's Education Manager for a dozen years. Connecting the college and the community is one of Suzanne's favorite aspects of the program, based twenty minutes from campus at Fairfield Osborn Preserve, high on Sonoma Mountain.

The internship programs she runs, in environmental education and land management, are very popular. In both programs, students spend five weeks learning hands-on skills and then apply those skills working with community partners throughout the county. Many students are so enthusiastic that they participate as volunteers during and after the training.

The Naturalist Training program is the most immersive of CEI's efforts, covering both the preserve's natural and cultural history. The program draws a diversity of students—majors in biology, music, psychology, and business—as well as members of the larger community. Once trained, the naturalists work with classrooms of third, fourth, and fifth graders from Cotati and Rohnert Park. The curriculum operates at several scales, from landscapes and watersheds to close observation and description.

The connection CEI makes to Sonoma Mountain is broad and deep. In the classroom lesson they always look for a view of the mountain. Funding from the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria provides additional connections to the mountain's long human history and how it is still held, as Suzanne says, as "an intangible sacred space." Graton Rancheria supports the program via grants to the Cotati-Rohnert Park School District and also provides funding for undergrad students to be in the program. The program reaches some more distant students from Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Sebastopol, Healdsburg and even Richmond.

After an introductory lesson at school, the kids make a field trip to the preserve. Their time on the mountain is devoted to outdoor activities and exploration, no matter the weather. "Giving them a hands-on experience is really important," says Suzanne, speaking about both the naturalist interns and the elementary students. "We like to get animals into people's hands, even those who might start out with a phobia, like snakes. Some of the most hesitant interns have said they soon start looking forward to handling the animals."



Suzanne recalled one elementary student remarking to a friend, "This is the best day of my life." To which her friend replied, "It can't be the best day. The best day was when you were born." "OK," said the first student, "it's the second-best day of my life."

"One thing the contact between elementary and college students does," says Suzanne. "is create possibilities in the minds of the younger ones. Many come from families where no one has attended college. But after going through CEI, many start talking about it as a possibility. It demystifies college for them."

Likewise, working as a naturalist at Fairfield Osborn opens the minds of college interns. A student who had grown up in Los Angeles said it was "the first time she'd seen creeks that weren't in concrete." While many interns go into environmental fields and teaching, Suzanne doesn't expect everyone to follow that path. The changes she sees are often subtle, but life-changing. A business major reflected, "It changed how I think about economics." He explained that the small size of Fairfield Osborn, 450 acres, made him appreciate finitude and limitations. There are not endless resources to exploit for anyone trying to make a living there.

It's a small place with a big impact. In her twelve years at the helm, Suzanne has inspired more than 600 college interns and supported preserve experiences for 13,000 K-12 students and 15,000 community members. Besides intern training for land managers, CEI is also a place where cross-pollination between art and science can happen.

In one example, the Theater Arts and Environmental Justice Departments collaborated for an outdoor performance exploring despair about climate change and the possibility that turtles may disappear from Fairfield Osborn's Turtle Pond. It ended with a request for the audience to write, on a stone, an action they wanted to take. The intent was to lift despair toward hope.

Suzanne herself finds hope in the coming generation. "They focus on bigger issues than they did 30 years ago," she says. "And they strive to be helpful and humble."

I too often feel a sense of despair and hopelessness. I also believe that without hope there is no hope. Hope is essential to meeting this crisis. As the program evolved in the summer and autumn of 2021, Tony proposed combining SMP's desire to introduce students to the mountain with SEC's climate change curriculum, which had already been refined in the classroom. We would bring climate change home to students, make it local and tangible, by designing curriculum around questions like:

- How does Sonoma Mountain influence our local climate?
- What role has it played in climate change in the past? And in the present and future?
- What effects of climate change can be observed on the mountain?
- How might the plants, animals, and humans living there adapt to these changes?
- How does the mountain serve as a place of refuge and resilience for living things and for the human spirit?
- How can we build a sense of possibility and hope in the future?

Our first full program has already begun at Presentation School in Sonoma. On the first day of class we introduced students to Sonoma Mountain with a slide presentation, discussed its value as wildlife habitat, water resource, and open space, and did several activities. Besides exploring the questions above, students will also explore their thoughts and feelings about the mountain, climate change, and the future through a "graffiti wall," and individual writing exercises. Part of our plan is to bring in Poet-Teachers from California Poets in the Schools for lessons, in addition to those taught by SEC.

"Sonoma Valley is geographically isolated, but the effects of climate change are not. One mountain that feeds three watersheds is a visible symbol of something all of us need to realize—that these issues are greater than any one place.



"Like standing on the ridgeline of the mountain, we are at a divide as a society. Connections need to be strengthened among the communities around Sonoma Mountain and beyond. Working in collaboration, we can become more resilient and supportive in slowing the effects of climate change on those who will feel it most in their lives, our children."

—Tony Passantino,
Education Director

One of the inspirations for this program is a book by anthropologist Keith Basso, who spent years living in Arizona with the Western Apache. His book, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, describes one of their strongest traditions: when someone violates tribal ethics, no one confronts them directly. But at the next gathering, an elder will tell a story from the tribal canon that begins with its location: "This happened at..." The story then recounts how, through greed or anger or pride, someone violated accepted behavior and the consequences that arose from their actions.

The transgressor is not publicly identified and never loses face. But when it's told effectively, they know the story is about them—the experience is described as being "shot" by the story. From then on, whenever that person passes by the place or hears its name, they remember the story and are encouraged to do things differently next time. The Apache say these stories "help them live right." The land itself reminds them.

Humbly borrowing that idea, we might begin: "This happened on Sonoma Mountain. For a long time people neglected to tend this living treasure, even forgot it was there at all." But this story can end differently than the ones in the media. Maybe years from now, people will recall what came next: "Over many years, people began seeing the mountain and the world differently—as a place they knew and took care of, a place that connected them to each other, made them realize that for better or for worse, we're all in this together. And slowly the world began to heal."

I can find hope in that idea.



several kids that I hoped the school would burn down; and it did burn down a few days later. I really had nothing to do with that, but they called me into the office and asked me questions.”

Verna Bliven Morris never formally attended the Enterprise School—by the time she was in fourth grade, it had been consolidated into Dunbar Unified. But her happiest memory of schooling was at the foot of the mountain, in the red Glen Ellen schoolhouse perched above the creek on O'Donnell Lane. “It washed away down the creek one stormy day,” Morris recalled. “My teacher despaired that I'd ever learn math. I could hardly contain my glee when all those blackboards, I hated so, washed down the creek.”

West-Side Schoolhouses

The Burns District School served children on the west side of Sonoma Mountain, and appears on map dating back to 1895 as a steeped schoolhouse on a ranch property. Records aren't as easy to find as those for the Enterprise School, but an article from the June 19, 1947, edition of the *Petaluma Argus-Courier* memorialized the school, which had merged with the Mountain School and was closing after “70 years of teaching ABCs and ‘rithmetic to its farm children.” Former students, the anonymous reporter writes, “will recall the walk to school or horse back rides over the beautiful hillsides and woodland trails in the early morning sunshine of Sonoma Mountain.”

The two schools were originally located on separate mountain ranches until a “lack of pupils” necessitated the merger. This seems to have occurred before July 1908, when a *Santa Rosa Republican* report on the proceedings of Sonoma County's Board of Supervisors included this short note: “The Burns school district was declared lapsed.”

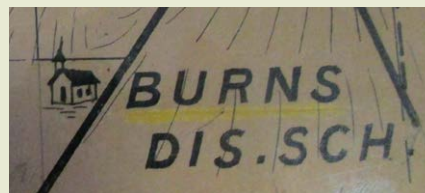
The writer of the *Argus-Courier* article recalls “many interesting and sometimes humorous” incidents at Burns and Mountain Schools. School board elections were lively, as were barn dances. But most memorable was “Old Man Gibbs,” who was, according to the reporter, the only teacher who “never quit” the Burns School; prior to his tenure, the “pupils were out of hand and had the reputation of running teachers out.”

Edward Gibbs used a firm hand to bring things under control. “When he opened the school, he told the pupils ‘You're through with the trouble making,’” the *Argus-Courier* reporter wrote. “Some of the boys did not believe him, so he convinced them by taking them one by one and whipping them thoroughly.” It wasn't just the naughty who felt the wrath of Mr. Gibbs: “If pupils were drowsy or inattentive or the lesson had not been learned, a good crack on some portion of the anatomy with a 15 inch ruler, one-half inch thick, and brass-edged, would remind them.”

Mr. Gibbs's tactics didn't entirely stifle misbehavior, however. Prior to a visit by the school superintendent, Miss Minnie Coulter, students mischievously studded her seat with pens, but the prank was foiled by the “formidable clothing of that day,” which bent the penpoints over so they didn't leave a mark.

In those early days, the *Argus-Courier* writer relates, “the mis-fit child had no one to help him, outside his family; the brilliant pupil suffered from poor teaching and the world of school children had a small radius.” All that changed, however, as time passed, and when the Mountain School closed, it had its own library, recreation room, phonograph, and more. Dunbar School has the same, right down to the phonograph, a legacy passed down over many a school year.

The Burns District School was just a quarter-mile south of Sonoma Mountain's summit (1895 ‘Breadboard Map,’ Sonoma County Records Office)



Poems by Sixth Graders

Kenwood Elementary School

‘The Other Side of the Mountain’ Pilot, Spring 2021

Rise over the mountain.
Over in the distance;
a trail to a lost rainbow.

John

Patient grey fox
Waiting forever
Hoping the climate
Will soon get better
But as he waits
The smog gets thicker
Making him feel sicker and sicker

Isabella

THE UMBRELLA TREE

Tracy Salcedo

A limb rests on the ground, bent like a wrist. Branches rise from the point of contact, an open palm with leaves as fingertips. Alone under the Umbrella Tree's arching crown, I curl my arms around the outstretched bough and breathe in the smell of bay. I'm a Bay Area girl; bay smells like home.

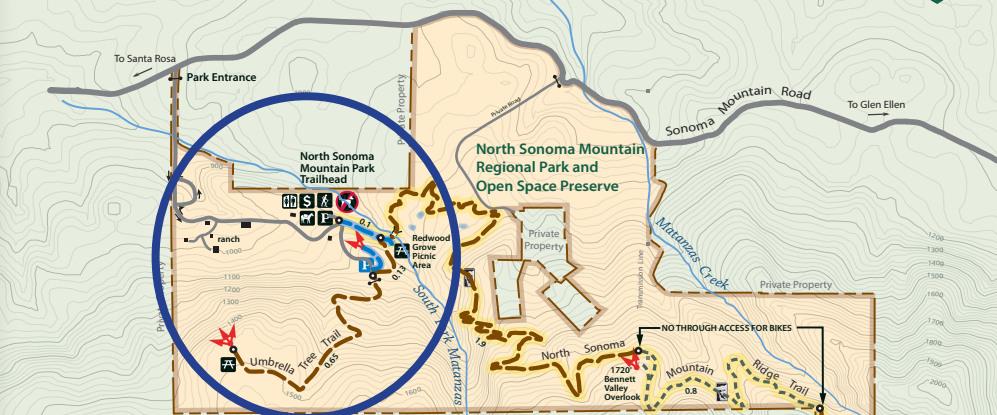
Outside the tree's green canopy panoramic views open to the Santa Rosa Plain, Taylor Mountain, Bennett Mountain, Mount St. Helena, Hood Mountain, and a glorious stretch of the Mayacamas Range. I feel like I've entered a quiet room with green curtains drawn. I walk through the cradle where the tree's many trunks rise in the bay laurel version of a redwood's fairy circle; this isn't one tree, but a cluster. It's fall, so bay nuts litter the rocky ground. The Umbrella Tree hushes me; I walk softly, breathe deeply, and linger.

The Umbrella Tree is at the high point (about 1,500 feet) and endpoint of a mile-long trail. The route begins in the Jacobs Ranch parking lot off Sonoma Mountain Road, about equidistant from Glen Ellen (east) and Rohnert Park (west). The trail is one of two in the 820-acre park; the Ridge Trail is the other, linking to Jack London State Historic Park.

To reach the Umbrella Tree from the upper parking lot, follow the service road/trail up and to the right (west), passing around a gate. The trail climbs steadily and relatively steeply at first, into a mixed oak woodland studded with madrones. The track is wide enough for hikers and other users to pass comfortably. About three-quarters of a mile up the pitch moderates, and the route breaks out into meadowlands on the shoulder of Sonoma Mountain. To the south, rolling ridges rise toward the summit. The Umbrella Tree, a massive scoop of dark green, comes into view, and the trail bends northwest to reach it.

A picnic table at trail's end offers a

North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park & Open Space Preserve



Open sunrise to sunset. Parking fee. Picnic facilities and restrooms. Dogs not permitted.

Visit <https://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Visit/North-Sonoma-Mountain-Regional-Park-and-Preserve/>



great place to snack and take in the views. At one time an interpretive sign identified the high points along the sweeping panorama, but the panels were gone when I visited in late fall. Even unnamed, the peaks and ranges are wonderful to behold, folding back to the horizon, where their rugged ridgelines touch the sky. The Umbrella Tree rises just east of the picnic site. After you've given a limb a hug, return to the trailhead as you came.

To tack a nice short addition onto this 2-mile out-and-back trek, drop down the trail to the right after you pass the gate near the parking lot. Descend

into a stand of redwoods, one of the only groves on the north slope of the mountain. Continue down the trail to its junction with the Ridge Trail, then go left/uphill to the trailhead, adding about 0.3 mile to your walk.

Heading out on the Ridge Trail is another option. Also a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, this path runs about 4 miles one way to the boundary of Jack London State Historic Park. Many hikers opt to make a point-to-point journey of about 8 miles, linking North Sonoma Mountain to Jack London, and use a car shuttle to return to the starting point.



Sonoma Mountain Preservation

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