Hiking in Mount Diablo State Park • Debbie McKeown, Mount Diablo State Park Volunteer

Are you looking for an exhilarating full-day adventure? A gentle family stroll? A challenging aerobic workout? You’re sure to find a hike on Mount Diablo that’s perfect for you. And while you’re at it, there’s a good chance you’ll also find inspiring views, quiet forests, and maybe even an interesting wildlife encounter. Hiking is one of the most popular activities for Mount Diablo State Park visitors, with over 160 miles of fire roads and trails to appeal to hikers of all levels and interests.

**Mary Bowerman Trail**

The Mary Bowerman Trail, accessed from the Lower Summit Picnic Area near Mount Diablo’s summit, is one of the park’s most popular trails and an excellent choice for first-time visitors. This easy 0.7-mile loop completely encircles the summit of Mount Diablo, offering expansive views in all directions and a fascinating overview of the mountain’s varying terrain. Be sure to pick up the interpretive guide at the trailhead to fully appreciate this hike. The northern section of the trail was recently paved as an accessible trail to be enjoyed by even more visitors.

From Juniper Campground, follow Deer Flat Road and take right turns at each junction: Meridian Ridge Road, Bald Ridge Trail, and North Peak Trail to Devil’s Elbow. From here, take Summit Trail up to the Lower Summit Picnic Area. Cross the lower summit parking lot to the west to continue on Juniper Trail. From the edge of the parking lot, it’s all downhill to Juniper Campground.

**Grand Loop**

The Grand Loop is a popular, more strenuous 6.3-mile version of the Mary Bowerman Trail, circling the mountain’s summit at a lower elevation on some of the park’s most attractive hidden trails, where hikers can enjoy bird song, rock gardens, and of course Mount Diablo’s signature sweeping views.

As you become more familiar with the park, you might want to plan hikes from some of the lesser-known trailheads, such as Macedo Ranch, Finley Road, or Red Corral. Long-time Mount Diablo hikers return again and again to favorite trails, savoring them in all seasons. Some hikers develop an interest in hiking all of the park’s trails, the entire 162-mile trail system—an ambitious project without a doubt, but an incredible way to truly appreciate the scope of the mountain.

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As peace officers in Mount Diablo State Park, our rangers experience daily the incredible natural environment that visitors come to see on an occasional basis. They are also all too familiar with the potential hazards that a mix of Bay Area congestion within a wilderness setting can pose for visitors and wildlife alike.

After nearly 25 years in this park, Ranger Carl Nielson retired from State Parks, and we sincerely appreciate his many years of dedicated service. Also an avid and talented cyclist, Carl knows first-hand the appreciate his many years of dedicated service. Also an avid and talented cyclist, Carl knows first-hand the

**Road Safety Made Simple**

- Carl Nielson, Retired State Park Ranger

The paved roads of Mount Diablo State Park are mountainous, steep, narrow, and winding. Traffic collisions occur, resulting in property damage and injuries. Many of these collisions can be prevented by following two simple rules:

- Ascending motorists should not pass cyclists on blind curves.
- Descending cyclists need to reduce their speed and maintain control.

In other words, obey the law. Please be patient and cautious when driving and cycling in the park. Let’s work together to make Mount Diablo State Park safe for everyone!

People come to Mount Diablo for many reasons. With more than 7 million residents in the Bay Area, Mount Diablo is the place for many to start training for such lofty destinations as Half Dome, Denali, Killimanjaro, and Everest. Sometimes a couple will arrive at Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center, each carrying a 40-pound backpack, and inquiring about the shortest way to the summit. Other visitors use Mount Diablo for rehabilitation after an accident or illness, often looking for a short gentle hike of just a mile or two.

Experienced volunteer docents are available to guide every visitor, regardless of their goal, through the process of reading the State Park's trail post signs (see page 8) and orienting a map properly. They advise visitors to carry plenty of water, dress in layers, wear good shoes, and, if appropriate, travel with "four-wheel drive" in the form of trekking poles. Hikers are also advised to let someone know where they are going and when they expect to return.

The Mitchell Canyon and Summit visitor centers offer the most detailed map of the mountain's trail system. *Trail Map of Mount Diablo State Park* provides a variety of free handouts; and will soon have a first-ever Hiker’s Guide to Mount Diablo State Park book with 50 hikes, including the most popular hikes and even several new ones. With this book, we hope to promote fitness by offering hikes that will interest all park visitors. Hikes range from less than half a mile to a full marathon that circumnavigates the mountain.

Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA), a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization, works closely with State Parks staff to enhance your visit to this park. Check MDIA’s website, mdia.org, for current information on the park and MDIA activities, including guided hikes, such as tarantula walks in the fall and wildflower hikes in the spring. Enjoy your visit to Mount Diablo, and stay safe and healthy!

If you’re up for a short hike in Mount Diablo State Park and want to see something unique, here’s an opportunity. Drive to the Mitchell Canyon Road 200 yards to the #1 interpretive signpost on the left of the trail. The large tree to your right is a blue oak, although up close, it looks a bit more pinkish-red than blue. Step up to one of the low-hanging branches, and you’ll realize that most of the leaves are studded edge to edge on the underside with fuzzy reddish growths. In fact, it’s hard to find a leaf that’s not velvety with these…what in the world are they? Some sort of odd fruit? A nasty disease?

Neither. They are the nurseries of the crystalline gall wasp, a tiny, stingless wasp native to California, one of many members of the cynipid family. Unlike the hive-building wasps you want to steer clear of, this wasp lives a solo existence. That existence is short and focused entirely on laying eggs one at a time on the leaves of just four kinds of oak trees, and favoring above all the blue oak. That done, this delicate little wasp soon dies.

But that’s not the remarkable part. It’s this: An unidentified hormone injected into the leaf by the wasp as she lays her eggs actually coerces the tree into building the miniscule structures known as galls. The tissue making up the gall, in other words, is provided by the tree, not the wasp. The tree, not the mother wasp, feeds and nurtures the egg until it develops into an adult wasp and emerges from the gall. Even more surprising, the tree makes the gall according to an intricate, unique design that’s also transferred from the wasp in the egg-laying process, though biologists do not yet know how this happens. Some think the hormone subtly hijacks the tree’s DNA, turning it into a gall factory.

At least 42 species of Cynipid wasps in California lay their eggs on blue oaks, resulting in 42 different kinds of galls. That’s some job of hijacking. Galls don’t seem to harm the tree, however, even when heavily hit by wasps. There are other kinds of galls on this blue oak, but you may not be able to spot them because, for yet another reason biologists don’t understand, the occurrence of crystalline galls has boomed in the last few years, and they may well overlap other kinds of galls on the leaf. But take a look. If you see a crown-like red gall, it may be the nursey of an urchin gall wasp; a little red volcano belongs to the red cone gall wasp; a tiny bowl-like growth is the gall of the saucer gall wasp. Look near the #1 signpost to see some sapling blue oaks. These are also galled. Geoffrey Chaucer coined “busy as a bee” in his *Canterbury Tales*. Clearly he’d never seen wasp galls.

**Hiking in Mount Diablo State Park (continued from page 1)**

Be sure to bring along your *Trail Map of Mount Diablo State Park*, a detailed topographic map that shows all trails in the park. If you don’t already have one, you can purchase it at a park entrance station or visitor center or online at mdia.org.

There is much to inspire hikers in Mount Diablo State Park, from grassy meadows, silent forests, and stream-cut canyons, to intriguing wildlife and interesting geology. So, lace up your hiking boots, pack a lunch, and come explore the mountain’s magnificent trails.
Camping at Mount Diablo State Park

Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps: Juniper Campground (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) located approximately 2 miles below the summit, on Summit Road. Juniper is known for its fantastic views. Three campsites meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. Reservations available.

Live Oak Campground (23 sites, elevation 1,450 ft.) located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, of South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. Reservations available.

Junction Campground (6 sites, elevation 2,200 ft.) located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. Available on a first-come, first-served basis only.

Group Camps are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary. Each campground is primitive with running water (subject to availability) and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. RVs are not allowed in the group camping areas. Reservations available.

- All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water (subject to availability) and restrooms. Showers are available at Juniper and Live Oak campgrounds at no additional charge.
- The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, but can accommodate RVs up to 20 feet in length. No hookups and dumping stations are provided.

Camping Procedures

Make reservations 48 hours to 7 months in advance by contacting Reserve America at 800.444.7275 or www.reserveamerica.com. Reservations can be made for a specific campground but not a specific site. Campers cannot be registered at Mitchell Canyon. Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

During the fire season (generally May to October), the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925.837.2525 or 925.837.0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

General Rules

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- 8 people and 2 vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent's phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No firewood gathering is permitted.
- Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. NO GROUND FIRES.
- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 8).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate camp or picnic ground.

Group Picnic Reservations: Call Ranger Daniel Golde at 925.837.6129 x3
Mount Diablo Wildlife • Jenn Roe, Mount Diablo State Park Volunteer

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### Across

6. I like it near water; fresh or salty matters not to me. I have glossy black feathers with bright red shoulder patches. And if you like music, then you’ll love my song! (3 words)

7. I’m related to spiders and eat like a vampire. I’m very, very small. No one invites me on their hikes, although I might hitch a ride anyway.

9. I am California’s state bird.

10. I don’t have a foot, but I’m 3,849 feet high. What’s my name? (2 words)

11. I am not blind. In fact, I probably “see” better than you do at night. I fly like a bird, but there are no feathers on me. There are 13 species of my kind on Mount Diablo.

12. Some think I’m hairy and scary, but I’m really a gentle giant—with eight legs and eight eyes! See you in the fall.

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### Down

1. I have zebra-like stripes, and my name says I’m the ruler of snakes. I don’t have venom. Instead, I squeeze my prey before eating.

2. I’m tiny and so are my cup-shaped nests. My wings hum while I sip on nectar.

3. I may look familiar, but I’m not a native California bird. I like to gobble, gobble, gobble up acorns, nuts, fruits, and seeds.

4. Leaves of three—let me be! Enjoy my red fall colors, but don’t touch unless you want a rash. Most people are allergic to me, but birds adore my berries, deer munch my leaves, and bees are sweet on my pollen. (2 words)

5. My long ears may catch your attention, but I bet you can’t catch me. When there’s a need for speed, I run up to 30 miles per hour. I don’t want to be a coyote’s next meal!

8. I’m a big cat with a short tail. I usually come out in the evening or early morning. And don’t call me Robert!

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### MDIA Product Order and Membership Form

Clip and mail to MDIA, PO Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346. Checks only, made payable to MDIA.

- **Maps and Hiking Information**
  - Trail Map of Mount Diablo State Park (7th Ed.) 7.50
  - Hiking Brochures: Easy, Moderate, Demanding (set of 3) 2.00

- **Interpretive Publications**
  - Mount Diablo: The Extraordinary Life and Landscapes of a California Treasure 60.00
  - The Mount Diablo Guide (3rd Ed.) 17.00
  - Trees and Shrubs of Mount Diablo 7.50
  - Common Birds of Mount Diablo 7.50
  - Mt. Diablo Wildflowers 7.50
  - Mountain Lore—History & Place Names of Mount Diablo 7.50
  - Trees and Shrubs of Mount Diablo 7.50
  - Common Birds of Mount Diablo 7.50
  - Mt. Diablo Wildflowers 7.50
  - Geology Brochure and Map 2.50

- **Nature Guides (Laminated/Folded)**
  - Local Birds of the San Francisco Bay Area 9.75
  - Local Rocks of North America 9.75
  - Local Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay Area 9.75
  - Local Animal Tracks of North America 9.75

- **Products with Mount Diablo State Park Logo**
  - T-shirts: Sky Blue or Stonewashed Green; S, M, L, XL (circle size and color) 16.00
  - Mount Diablo Patch 4.00
  - Mount Diablo Lapel/Hat Pin 5.50

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**Thank you for your mail order!**

Profits from sales support the educational programs of MDIA.

[www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar](http://www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar)

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### Summit Museum

- **Open**
  - 7 days a week
  - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
  - 925.837.6119

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### Event Calendar

Check out all the hikes and other events happening in Mount Diablo State Park.

[www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar](http://www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar)

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### Membership Application

Membership dues are deductible to the full extent allowed by law. New memberships include a free Mount Diablo trail map.

- **Member Category (circle one)**
  - Student/Senior (55+) $15
  - Individual $25
  - Family $40
  - Contributing $100
  - Lifetime $500

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**Thank you!**

Donations can be made using the form below.

**Dues**

Name: ______________________

Address: ___________________

City: ______________________

State/Zip: __________

Telephone: (____) ________

Email: _____________________

**Join MDIA or renew your membership online now. Use your smartphone.**

[mdia.org/site/online-store/memberships](http://mdia.org/site/online-store/memberships)

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**Thank you for your mail order!**

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**SDMA Event Calendar**

Check out all the hikes and other events happening in Mount Diablo State Park.

[www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar](http://www.mdia.org/site/mdia-event-calendar)

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**Article or Photograph Submission**

To submit articles or photographs for the next issue of the Mount Diablo Review, email info@mdia.org or leave a message at 925.927.7222. Submission deadline for the Spring/Summer issue is January 15, 2016.
Around 400 trail signposts identify over 160 miles of backcountry hiking trails and fire roads in Mount Diablo State Park’s nearly 20,000 acres.

The trail signs in the park follow the California State Parks uniform format. The name of the trail you are on is specified in relatively small horizontal type near the top of the sign.

The name that appears vertically in large type (usually another trail but sometimes a destination or park boundary) shows the termination of that particular trail; the word “TO”, in small letters, is important. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.

Understanding Trail Signs

- **Park Rules**
  You are responsible for obeying these and other Park rules
  - **All Features of the Park Are Protected!** Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
  - **Park Hours:** Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at sunset. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out at sunset to avoid being locked in.
  - **No Alcohol:** All alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
  - **Vehicles/Bicycles Speed Limit:** 15 to 25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
  - **Bicycles** are allowed only on paved roads, fire roads and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.

**Fire Danger: How Will It Affect You?**
- Maintain fires at all times in a safe condition that does not threaten any person or natural or structural feature.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Extinguish all fires prior to departure.
- Ground fires are not permitted.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Report all wildfires immediately. Call 911.

- **Skateboards**, rollerblades, rollerskates, and gravity-propelled devices are prohibited.
- **Dogs:** Must be on leash at all times when out of your car; must be in tent or a vehicle at night; and must stay in developed areas—they are not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- **Fires:** Restrictions in effect during season. Check with a Ranger. Fires must be in fire stoves or barbecues provided—no ground fires.
- **Emergencies:** Dial 911.
- **Fireworks** are prohibited.
- **Firearms/airguns** are prohibited.
- **Hunting** is prohibited.