Peregrines at Castle Rock, A History
Staci Hobbet, Lead of the Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon

The fastest animal on earth is a neighbor of yours. It’s the peregrine falcon, clocked at more than 200 miles per hour as it dives for prey, mostly other birds. Address? The dramatic sandstone pinnacles called Castle Rock on the western edge of Mount Diablo State Park.

Peregrines have nested in Castle Rock for thousands of years except, notably, during the four decades between 1950 and 1989, when peregrines across the country and in Britain were nearly wiped out by DDT, the pesticide Rachel Carson wrote about so eloquently in her 1962 classic, *Silent Spring*. California’s peregrine population plummeted from more than 400 nesting pairs to one confirmed pair, in Morro Bay near San Luis Obispo. The Castle Rock pair disappeared.

Why? Some environmental pollutants, such as DDT, aren’t broken down even by digestion but are stored intact in the body, and so accumulate in the food chain as smaller creatures are eaten by larger ones, a relentless process known as biomagnification or bioaccumulation. A pigeon, for instance, may ingest a tiny amount of pesticide on its mostly-vegetarian diet, but a peregrine may eat a whole pigeon every couple of days, gradually turning all the minute doses into a toxic total. In peregrines and a number of other birds at the apex of the food chain—bald eagles, brown pelicans, and ospreys—this toxicity interrupted the metabolism of calcium, thinning their eggs to the point of collapse. Thanks to quick detective work by researchers, the link was discovered while there was still time for humans to interfere again, but on the positive side, with large-scale protection and reintroductions.

In the Castle Rock area, volunteers and environmental organizations first joined forces during an intense six-week period early in 1989 by placing captive-hatched peregrine chicks in the nests of prairie falcons, a closely-related bird that was less affected by DDT due to a diet of rodents and insects, which are lower on the food chain. Fortunately, these foster parents didn’t recognize the ruse and didn’t keep track of how many chicks
Welcome to Mount Diablo State Park! I hope you are able to explore a trail, enjoy a picnic, or experience the panoramic views during your visit. Mount Diablo Interpretive Association (MDIA), the park’s all-volunteer cooperating association, provides a variety of resources to make your visit as enjoyable and educational as possible.

**New Website:** Our updated website, www.mdia.org, provides a wealth of information to help you plan your visit to Mount Diablo, including directions to the park, camping information, suggestions for hiking, and the park’s all-volunteer cooperating association, providing a variety of resources to make your visit as enjoyable and educational as possible.

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**Wildflower Guide:** The recently updated wildflower guide is now available on our website. The guide is organized by color and includes photographs in addition to common and scientific names for many of the flower species found on the mountain.

**Audible Mount Diablo:** The Audible Mount Diablo audio tours, also available on our website, are a great way to learn about the natural and cultural history of the park during your visit. These guides can be downloaded to your mobile device so you can follow along as you explore the park’s unique landscape.

These are just a few of the many resources that MDIA provides for visitors. I hope you find them useful and enjoy your visit to this Bay Area treasure.

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were hunched, always hungry, in the nest. One pair successfully raised ten chicks in one season, most of them peregrines. Reintroductions were repeated in 1990 by a strengthened coalition, and the peregrines have been nesting annually at Castle Rock ever since.

It’s an inspiring success story. California is now nearly back to its pre-DDT peregrine population, and unlike California condors, the birds are thriving without constant human intervention. A new problem has raised its head at Castle Rock: the cliffs have long been a favorite hiking and party destination, and as the area’s human population has grown, so has the number of visitors. A study funded by the East Bay Regional Park District in 2017 showed that from 2000-2016, annual visits to its parks had jumped 78%. Our other open spaces, including Mount Diablo State Park, have seen similar trends.

In 2015, in response to this increase, Mount Diablo State Park joined with the East Bay Regional Park District, which includes Diablo Foothills Regional Park, also known as Castle Rock Park, in Walnut Creek, to close the pinnacles of Castle Rock to all visitors every year from February 1st to July 31st, the nesting season of the peregrines, when they need privacy and distance. That same year, a handful of Mount Diablo volunteers formed a monitoring team, named the Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon, to alert park visitors to the new closure zone, to tell them about the peregrines and the natural history of this small but rich ecosystem, and to report trespassers to the staffs of both parks.

This year was the team’s fourth, and it has grown each season, drawing on a dozen other area organizations, such as Mount Diablo Audubon Society, the California Native Plant Society, the Sierra Club, and Save Mount Diablo. Most of these newer members have also become trained MDSP volunteers and are involved with other activities as well, volunteering at the visitor centers, leading and assisting public hikes, and roving the trails to help park visitors.

In those four years, trespassing has trended downward, and the adult birds raised chicks successfully three times, including this year, though the season didn’t start out well. The adults nested in the spring as usual, but a second adult female peregrine showed up before the eggs hatched, possibly trying to horn in. Peregrines are fiercely territorial; this third adult showed the resident pair from the nest during cold weather, when the eggs needed warmth and frequent turning. After two weeks, they succeeded in driving off the spare peregrine, but had to start over with a fresh batch of eggs, shifting the hatching to a time of withering heat. But two young females have now joined their parents in the air, and will continue to learn the fine points of aerial hunting this fall and winter.

For more information, contact Staci Hobbet, Lead of the Peregrine Team in Pine Canyon: anastasiabobbet@gmail.com.

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**Winter Weather**

Michelle Hummel, MDIA Board Member

When most Bay Area residents think of snowy mountains, they imagine the Sierras, with their impressive snowpack that can last into the late spring or early summer. But even here in the East Bay, where the climate is rather mild, the occasional dusting of snow is visible at higher elevations on Mount Diablo. Although the snow doesn’t last very long, it makes for beautiful photos and provides a novel experience for park visitors.

While heavy snow is relatively uncommon on Mount Diablo, the mountain has experienced several large snow events since the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration first began collecting measurements at Mount Diablo Junction in 1952. The snowiest day on record was March 14, 1975, when 8 inches fell. The following month, in April of 1975, a total of 17 inches of snow fell, making this the snowiest month on record. In recent years, snowfall totals have been rather low, although 7 inches were recorded in February of 2001.

The records from Mount Diablo Junction, located at an elevation of 2,170 feet, give us a glimpse of some of the most significant snowfall on the mountain. However, conditions are often very different at the Summit, which is over 1,500 feet higher and

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A more detailed topographic map is available for purchase at the entrance stations and the Summit and Mitchell Canyon visitor centers.

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, off 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 Road and North Gate Road 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 up to 6 months in advance using the ReserveCalifornia website at reservecalifornia.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 electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- 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 6).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.
- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate camp or picnic ground.

**Group Picnic Reservations**: 925-855-1730
Winter Weather, continued from page 3

Typically gets more snow due to cooler temperatures. In the past few years, although no snowfall has been recorded at the weather station, park visitors and residents of the surrounding area have periodically seen the mountain with a dusting of white at higher elevations.

If you decide to visit Mount Diablo on a snowy day, keep in mind that the road to the Summit may be closed to vehicles due to ice, so be sure to call ahead to check on conditions. There is no safe place for sledding or skiing on the mountain, so hiking is the best way to enjoy snowy weather. Just be careful, as the trails may also be icy.

Even if you don’t catch a glimpse of snow during your winter visit to Mount Diablo, you are likely to experience rain. Last January and February were two of the rainiest months on record, with a combined 35 inches of rain. Wet winter days provide a nice respite from the heat that can plague the mountain during other times of the year, but wet conditions present unique hazards that visitors should be aware of. If you are visiting on a rainy day, be sure to slow down on the slick roads. As you venture out on the trails, wear sturdy shoes and dress in warm, waterproof layers.

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To learn more about this hike, visit the Hiking Mount Diablo page on the MDIA website (https://www.mdia.org/hiking-mount-diablo) and look for the China Wall hike link.

WHERE IN THE PARK IS THIS?

This rock formation, known as China Wall, is a layer of terminally-eroded sandstone that juts abruptly out of the surrounding landscape. The sandstone layer was pushed into a vertical position by the upthrust of Mount Diablo. Surrounding layers eroded away more rapidly, leaving a unique structure that resembles the Great Wall of China.

The 2.6 mile round-trip hike to China Wall starts at the Macedo Ranch Staging Area, at the end of Green Valley Road in Danville. Your hike begins on Wall Point Road. At the first junction, continue straight onto the Briones-Mount Diablo Regional Trail until you reach the junction with China Wall Road. Continue for a short distance to your destination.

To learn more about this hike, visit the Hiking Mount Diablo page on the MDIA website (https://www.mdia.org/hiking-mount-diablo) and look for the China Wall hike link.
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.
- Drones or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) are prohibited.
- 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 a 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 and hunting are prohibited.

Rules of the Road
For Motorists and Cyclists

Share the roadway with all Park users.

- Drive at or below the posted Park speed limits. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 22350*
- Pass with sufficient visual clearance. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21751*
- Do not pass on blind curves. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21752(a)*
- Give bicyclists 3 feet clearance. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21760(b)*
- Yield to equestrians. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21759*

*MINIMUM FINE: $238.00

Take your time and enjoy Mount Diablo’s scenic views

Mount Diablo State Park Phone Numbers

Supervising Ranger .................925.855.1730
Junction Ranger ......................925.837.6129
Mitchell Canyon Ranger..........925.672.4266
Summit Museum ....................925.837.6119
South Gate Entrance Station ...925.837.0904
Maintenance..........................925.837.6122
Sector Office .........................925.673.2891
General Information...............925.837.2525
TTY Relay Service....................711

Mount Diablo State Park
96 Mitchell Canyon Road
Clayton, CA 94517-1500

Understanding Trail Signs

Trail signs in the park follow 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 (another trail, destination, or park boundary) identifies the termination of that particular trail; note the word “TO” in small letters. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the Contra Solano Sector Office, 925.673.2891. This newsletter is available in alternate formats by contacting 925.673.2891.