

WHO NEEDS A STAIR CLIMBER?

How I Got to Know the Paths!



Sandy Friedland (on the left with clippers) with Elsa Tranter cleaning The Steps, the path by Sandy's house, in preparation for last year's BAHA Annual House Tour that was in our neighborhood. (Sandy's house was on the tour!)



My grandson, Noah, peeping through a fence hole while walking the paths.

outdoor living

By Claremont Resident,
Sandy Friedland

As my husband Tom and I planned our move from New Jersey to Berkeley in 2003, I declared that my days as a van-driving soccer mom were over. Vowing to get out from behind the wheel, I told our real estate agent that we would consider only houses within walking distance of BART, a grocery store, a dry cleaners, shops, and at least two places with *really* good coffee.

The home we bought near the bottom of Hillcrest Road met all those requirements, plus had a bonus: proximity to more than two dozen pedestrian pathways southeast of campus.

Although we were graduate students at Cal from 1969-1972, we never discovered the scores of public paths and stairways crisscrossing Berkeley's hilly neighborhoods. I first learned about them on one of our house-hunting trips when I bought a map called *Berkeley's Pathways* at Avenue Books (now Mrs. Dalloway's).

Back home, I kept the map on my nightstand, a tantalizing preview of where my feet might take me once we moved. I noticed that Berkeley Path Wanderers Association (BPWA) was the publisher and that that I could join the organization for just \$5. Within days, I became the only member with a New Jersey zip code.

The map also included a history of the paths. It's a story inextricably linked to the growth of the city itself:

In the early 1900s, the hilly areas east and north of Berkeley were largely owned by private developers and lay outside the city limits. The extension of rail and streetcar lines ... made it feasible for the developers to build

streets upon what was then open land and offer lots for sale.

By the time the hills were ready for development, it was clear that the traditional, straight-line grid pattern of streets was inappropriate for the terrain. The result were streets with intriguing twists and turns, built with a minimum of cut and fill, and neighborhoods with breathtaking vistas.

That commitment to preserving the contours of the hills also yielded some very long blocks with few intersections. Moreover, in those days, most families owned neither horses nor cars. Developers realized that the value of their lots would grow if there were strategically placed pe-



My grandchildren, Jackson and Noah, on Sunset Path.

destrian paths to provide shortcuts to and from public transit, shops, and schools.

As the neighborhoods were annexed to Berkeley, the paths were deeded to the city and became part of the public infrastructure. By the time houses filled all the lots, however, more people had cars, and the need for the paths decreased. Fifty paths on the original plat maps never got built — until, that is, four retired social workers started BPWA in 1998. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Two weeks after our arrival in Berkeley in January 2003, I went on one of the free walks that Path Wanderers offered to introduce people to the paths. The route began at the top of Solano Avenue on four-part Indian Rock Path. By the time we reached its end in Indian Rock Park, I was smitten.

To my delight, Berkeley's paths turned out to be far more than an alternative to streets and sidewalks. They quickly became my routes to new friends, Berkeley's eclectic architecture, beautiful gardens, yard art, and, of course, coffee. And did I mention that exploring the paths offered a great exercise routine that required no special equipment or a gym?

With my map in hand, I could find all 135 of the numbered and named paths in the city as well as others, like the one down median between the Uplands and Parkside, the Ohlone Greenway, and some just over the Berkeley borders in Oakland and Kensington.

Within a few months, I was working with BPWA volunteers to install wood-tie steps to complete some of those unfinished paths. I joined the BPWA board and began selling maps, leading some of twice-a-month walks, and writing for the quarterly newsletter. I even served as president of the group from 2005 to 2007.

These days, I'm back on the board and still contribute to the BPWA newsletter, which now is an electronic monthly. I especially love taking my five older grandchildren on paths walks, sometimes incorporating a scavenger hunt or an I-spy game.



From Left: Barbara James, Mary Bianchi, Kay Englund, and Angus Dunstan take a break while cleaning the Short Cut, behind the Claremont Hotel before the Firestorm Memorial Walk Path Wanderers led to mark the 25th anniversary of the Berkeley-Oakland Hills Firestorm.



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Sandy Friedland and Francesca Verdier increasing awareness of BPWA out in the community.

Over the years, I have created a series of Bingo walks for kids, which I offer once or twice a year. The Bingo cards for one version contain photos of 25 different bears on or near campus. As we walk the area, the young players have to spot each bear and cross it off their cards. Everyone wins.

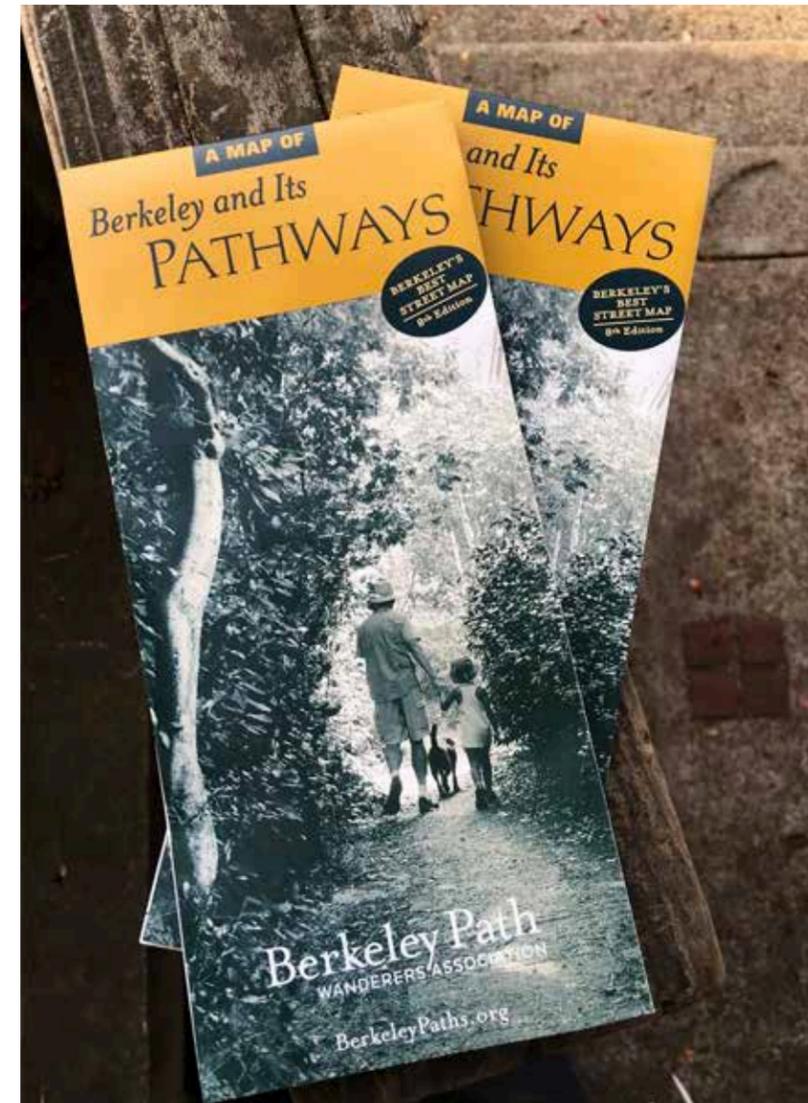
I used to be surprised at how many long-time Berkeley residents only knew about two or three paths and were unaware of all the others. Thanks to BPWA, however, the paths no longer are hidden gems. We have sold more than 35,000 copies of our map, now in its 8th edition and renamed *Berkeley and Its Pathways*.

Our volunteers have completed 34 of those unfinished paths. As the number of those missing paths dwindled, the organization set some new goals: weeding and trimming overgrown paths and raising money for handrails on some of the steepest ones.

Most important, BPWA is partnering with the city to publicize how vital the paths would be in an earthquake or major fire when they would be evacuation routes and enable first-responders to reach emergencies. This effort includes holding drills, installing better signage, and — eventually — ensuring that the top and bottom of every path is lit at night.

Last month, in recognition of BPWA's 20th anniversary, Mayor Jesse Arreguin and the City Council issued a proclamation praising the organization's important contributions, among them its "inclusive activities [to] build community and keep residents in touch with the natural beauty of our great city."

I continue to invite family and friends from the East Coast to come visit, but I always insist: "Bring comfortable walking shoes!"



You can buy the 8th edition of the Berkeley Path Wanderers Association map at Star Grocery, Transports, Mrs. Dalloway's, Ellington & French, and at berkeleypaths.org

How You Can Get Involved!

Berkeley Path Wanderers Association (BPWA) invites Claremont residents to help us preserve, publicize, and extend Berkeley's treasured network of city-owned public pathways and stairs here in the neighborhood and across the city. Here's how:

- **Join us.** Dues start at \$5 a year per household. Sign up at berkeleypaths.org and you'll start receiving the monthly e-newsletter that includes all the upcoming activities. Visit our website: berkeleypaths.org
- **Take a walk.** Twice a month, BPWA offers free, guided walks. Once a quarter is a Pooches on the Paths walk for people and their four-footed friends. Descriptions of all the walks are on the BPWA website and in the newsletter.
- **Clear a Path.** Grab a broom and your clippers and spruce up the path nearest your house.
- **Buy a map.** Learn which paths are closest to you. The *Berkeley and Its Pathways* map costs only \$8 and is available at these local stores: Mrs. Dalloway's, Ellington & French, Star Grocery, and Transports. Or, order your copy online at berkeleypaths.org
- **Help Preserve Our Paths.** As part of Berkeley Path Wanderers Association's 20th anniversary celebration, we have decided to take an inventory of every path in the city on Sunday, July 22nd. We will have three different "launch pads," from which volunteers will take off on one of several self-led walks we have designed. Participants then will assess the condition of the paths on their routes. Meet at Monkey Island at 10 a.m. to get assignments for the paths in Elmwood, in Claremont, or on Panoramic Hill. Watch for more details on berkeleypaths.org

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