

Paths of El Cerrito

Length: 5.7 miles

Time: 2-3 hours

Difficulty: 3+ (because of uneven terrain)

Elevation Gain: 1,107 feet

Starting Point: The Kensington Library, at Arlington and Rincon.

Transportation: AC Transit lines 7 and H run along Arlington, stopping at the start. Parking is available by the library or on the road.

Overview:

This walk takes our favorite of the paths in El Cerrito and explores a range of trails and parks including the extensive and scenic Hillside Nature Area. It begins at the easily accessible Kensington Library and quickly climbs to the brink of Wildcat Canyon. You'll descend from the ridge on paths and trails, then return via a winding route of paths and quiet streets.

Directions and pictures:

Our one El Cerrito walk begins in Kensington, at the library, opposite where Rincon Rd. intersects Arlington. From here, walk up the steep, one-lane road past the library, through a traffic barrier made of white posts, and into Kensington Hilltop School. Stay right to continue around the southern end of the school, where the road ends by the playground. Turn left around the southern side of the playground, then left again onto Ye Olde School Trail, a pretty trail that runs atop the ridge along the edge of Wildcat Canyon. This walk takes only the northern end of



the trail, but the southern section of the trail is certainly worth walking some other time (see “Havey Canyon and Surrounding Trails”).

One can infer that the person who named the Ye Olde School Trail must not have gone to Schoole for very long, but the views more than make up for the dubious olde-fashioned spelling. The trail climbs, overlooking the canyon and the rolling hills west of San Pablo Ridge. It’s hard to believe that you’re still in urban Kensington here. When the trail ends after about a quarter mile, continue up the driveway and onto Kensington Court, which descends and turns into Kensington Rd. Every so often, a break in the houses reveals Wildcat Canyon Park far below. When Kensington Rd. ends, turn left onto Terrace Rd, then make an immediate right on Leneve Pl. At the end of this tiny road, stay left onto Ivy Pl. When this in turn ends, continue onto a singletrack trail between two houses. The trail descends to a larger one; make a slight right to meander along a ridge, then continue up the gentle southern slope of William Rust Summit. At the top is a shaded area, east of which you can gaze into Wildcat Canyon. Follow the trail steeply down switchbacks, then stay left on James Pl. at the bottom. Make a slight right onto a trail that follows the upper edge of Arlington park and should bring you to Villa Nueva St.

Turn right here, then right again on Arlington and soon after left down a path running from just south of the intersection with Brewster.

Left: The top block of your first official El Cerrito path

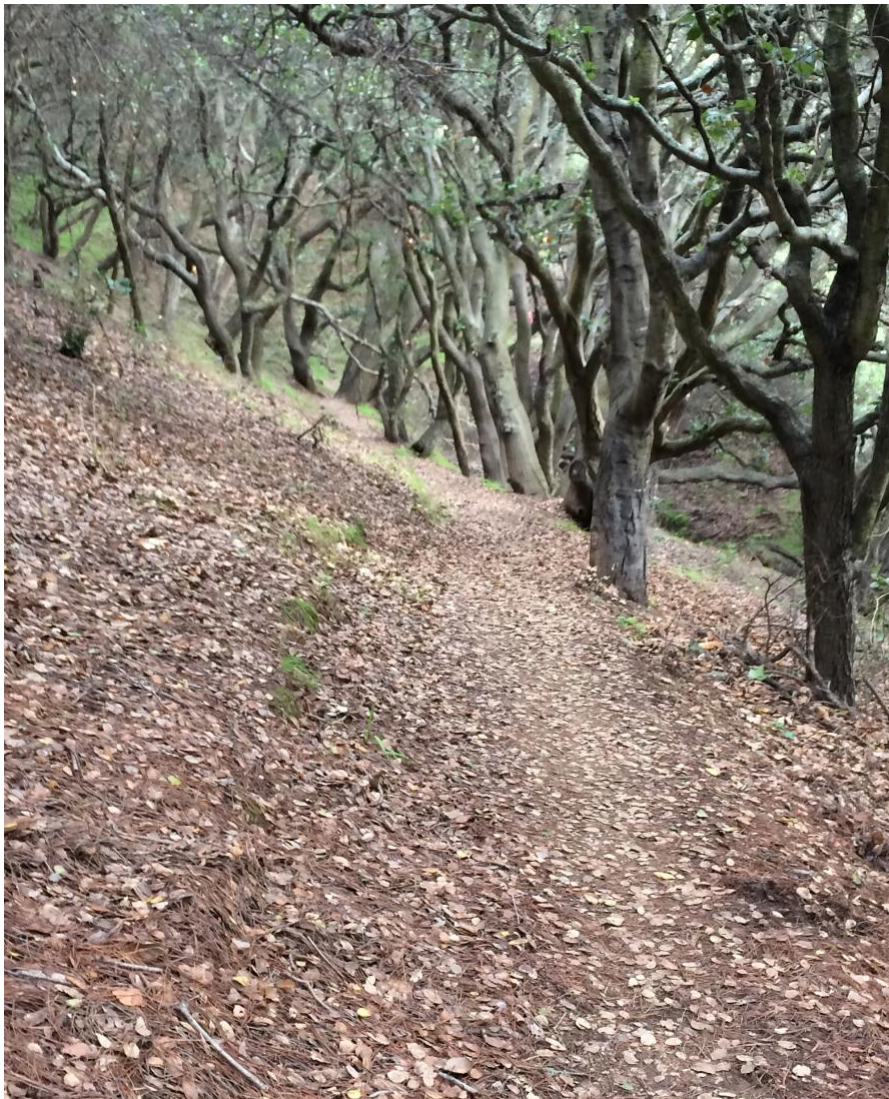
This path descends three scenic blocks down concrete steps through trees, past a house with a stream in the backyard. Continue straight at the bottom of the last block, then turn sharply right onto Shevlin Dr. Where the street ends after three short blocks, turn left, then right, to continue north, now on King Dr. Stay left at the next intersection to continue onto Contra Costa Dr. Two blocks later, make a left on Kent Dr, then a right on Regency Ct. You will quickly reach the top of a trail leading down into the El Cerrito Hillside Nature Area. Turn left here to descend into this lovely, large, and forested park.



At the first trail intersection, turn sharply left, then wander south, crossing a small stream and coming out of the trees to enjoy stunning views of El Cerrito and the Bay stretched out below you. Turn right where your trail ends at another, larger trail made of packed dirt. Turn right to descend this to where it exits the Nature Area onto Schmidt Ln, just below the El Cerrito Recycling Center. Turn right, then left on Navellier St. After one block, turn left up a dirt trail opposite Portola Dr. This trail is blocked to cars by a chain and ascends back into the hills. Stay right as you climb and, after just under a third of a mile, the trail should end at the intersection of Moeser Ln. and Seaview Dr. Cross Moeser and head south on Seaview for two blocks (jogging slightly right at Stockton), then turn left on Terrace and immediately

left again to enter Huber Park. Climb the path with the small park to your left and two steep blocks will bring you back to Terrace, which curves inefficiently around the park. Turn left, then make your first left onto Shevlin. At the intersection with Stockton, turn right up a narrow dirt path running between two houses. Make a right at the top, then turn left when you reach the intersection with Terrace Dr. Make your first right off of Terrace, up the small, dead-ending Gelston Pl. Turn slightly right before the end of the road onto Bay Tree Lane, then immediately right again down a concrete driveway and concrete-staired path, the last of the walk. At the bottom, turn left, then left again at the first opportunity up Edwin Dr, which ascends steeply, then curves right and

Left: One trail through the Hillside Nature Area



becomes Kerr Ave. You'll reach the top of the hill, then descend gradually, staying right to turn onto the quiet Rincon. One more block returns you to your starting point at Arlington, now hopefully a little better acquainted with El Cerrito's paths and trails.



The view of El Cerrito, as seen from the Hillside Nature Area