

The Skyline Sampler

Length: 11.6 miles

Time: 4-6 hours

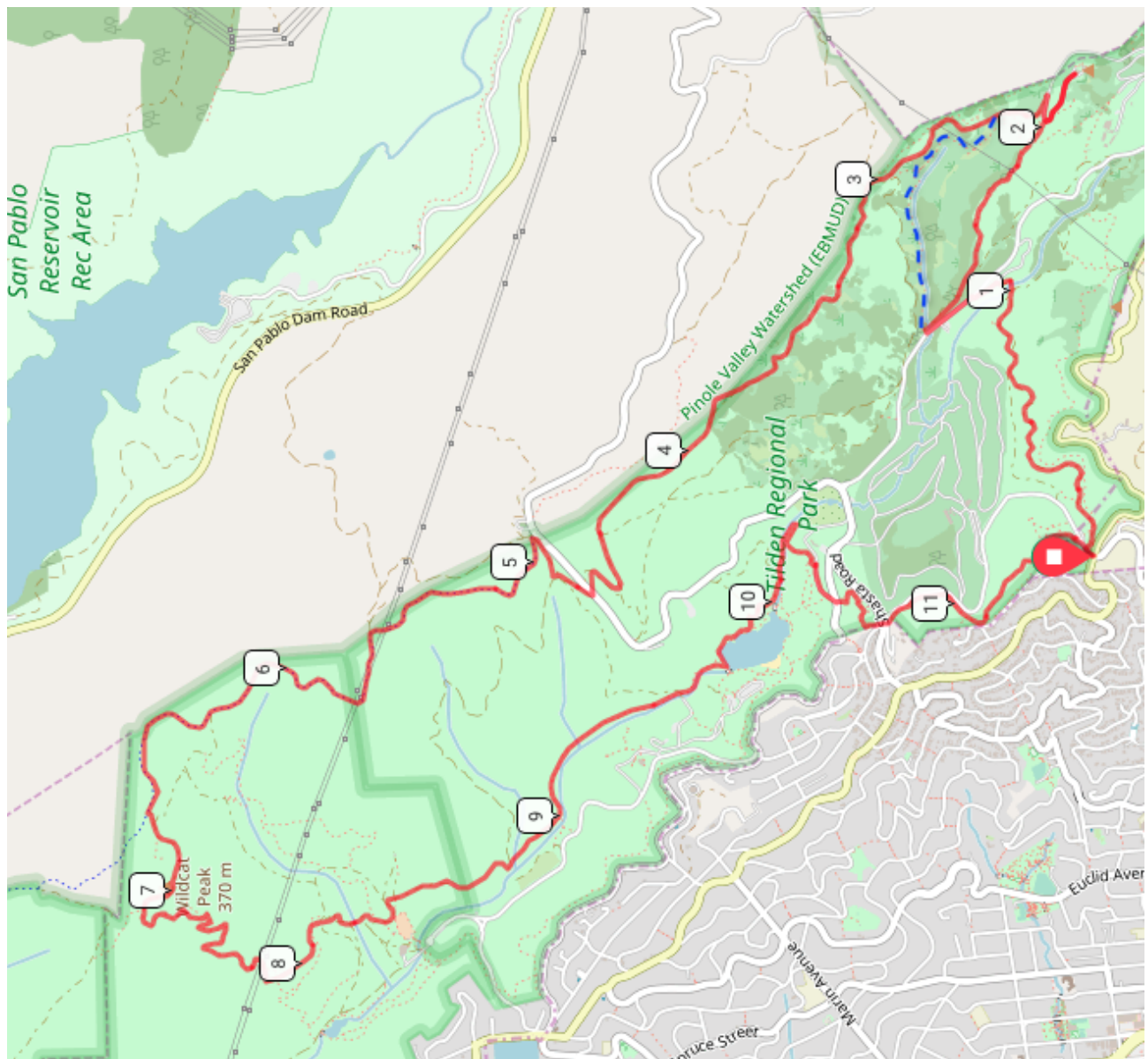
Difficulty: 5

Elevation Gain: 2,085 feet

Starting Point: Golf Course Dr. and Grizzly Peak Blvd (if you are taking the bus, start just down Centennial at the 65 stop)

Transportation:

AC Transit line 65. Parking is available southeast on Grizzly Peak or at the Redwood trailhead just down Golf Course Dr.



Step It Up: An Adventurer's Guide to Forty Walks on the Paths, Trails, and Streets of Berkeley and Beyond© 2019 by Jacob Lehmann Duke and Zeke Gerwein. All rights reserved.

Overview:

A great expedition into the scenic parklands east of Berkeley, The Skyline Sampler first goes down through redwoods to South Park Dr, then climbs to the highest point in Tilden (Vollmer Peak), on a choice of either the shaded Arroyo Trail or the more exposed Lupine Trail. From here, it descends with incredible views in both directions. You'll continue along the ridge, then climb to Wildcat Peak, descend into the heart of Wildcat Canyon, and return via the shaded and beautiful Wildcat Gorge Trail. Keep in mind that this walk is quite difficult, especially when traversing the often hot ridge. The walk is entirely on trails with the exception of one block of South Park Dr, which is closed to cars from November to March. If "quite difficult" is not enough for you, you can extend the walk into a gorgeous 23.8 mile challenge by referring to the Wildcat Loop (following walk) description at Nimitz Way. Once you reach the junction of the Sylvan Trail and Wildcat Peak Trail you can return to this walk description. This skips the climb up Wildcat Peak but creates a lengthy view-filled tour of two of the East Bay's most splendid parks.

We named this walk the Skyline Sampler because it takes a portion of the 31 mile East Bay National Skyline Trail. If you are not content with just a sample, the entire trail—Castro Valley to Richmond—makes a challenging day hike or a great two-day trip.



Directions and pictures:

Begin at the intersection of Grizzly Peak Blvd. and Centennial Dr, or just down Centennial if you are taking the bus. Head downhill on Golf Course Drive about 100 feet, then make a right into a gravel turnout toward the Redwood Trail. True to its name, the trail begins in a lovely grove of redwoods, soon emerging at the rim of a canyon.

Left: the middle of Seaview, a preview of coming attractions

The views north to Wildcat Canyon are excellent, encompassing grassy hills, a blanket of woodland to the north, and in the distance the grassy

summit of Wildcat Peak, which you'll climb later in the walk. The trail descends to join the Golf Course Trail. Stay right, and continue to where this trail ends, by the Laurel Picnic Area. Follow the narrow access road downhill (to the left), then make a slight left to walk down South Park Drive for one block, then turn right up the Arroyo Trail at the bottom of the steep hill. Here, you have a choice: if it is a hot day, you'll probably prefer to continue up the shaded Arroyo Trail to the left, which hits the Seaview Trail about .25 miles north of Vollmer Peak. See the next paragraph for the alternate option. Continue at any trail intersections you come to until you reach the top of this lovely 0.9-mile trail, then make a right on Seaview and another right up Vollmer Peak Rd. to the top of Vollmer Peak, the highest point in the East Bay with an incredible view down (if you want to skip some climbing and miss out on a view, you can just turn left from the top of Arroyo down Seaview instead, as that is where you will end up later anyway).



Left: The Bay view from Seaview

If it is a cooler day or you prefer a rockier, sunnier trail, make an immediate right off the Arroyo Trail at South Park and follow the Vollmer Peak Trail for a fifth of a mile. Here, take the left fork onto the Lupine Trail, which emerges from the leafy forest onto grassy hillsides. Views of the Bay and Mount Tamalpais get better and better as you climb steeply on the exposed trail. Finally, the Lupine Trail arrives at the paved Vollmer Peak Rd. (The

road is closed to cars, but watch out for bikes!) For the spur to the top, turn right up the road, which climbs steeply, bringing you to the highest point in Tilden. The views in all directions from this 1,920 foot summit are spectacular.

The two routes rejoin here: once you're done enjoying at the view, retrace your steps down Vollmer Peak Rd. as far as the wide dirt Seaview Trail, a quarter mile below the summit. Turn down this and descend to Upper Big Springs, then continue on Seaview upwards. At the top of the hill, turn slightly left to climb a bit more on a steep, single-track trail that leads to the top of an overlook. There's a bench here, and a collection of stones in the shape of a labyrinth. From this overlook, you can view all of Tilden, Berkeley, and Oakland; the San Francisco Bay; the San Rafael, Golden Gate, Bay, and San Mateo Bridges; and the Pacific Ocean extending as far as the Farallon Islands. It may well be the best view to the west in all of Tilden. The views to the east are excellent as well (better from the trail than the overlook), and you can look east at miles of rolling hills, past Briones to the rows of windmills on Sherman Island and the flat Central Valley.

Continuing north, descend steeply from the overlook to rejoin the main trail, which plunges briefly into a lovely forest. The trail rolls a bit and emerges from the woods to offer

another excellent view toward the headwaters of Wildcat Creek and San Francisco Bay. Soon after this, you'll descend steeply again past many eucalyptus trees to reach Wildcat Canyon Rd. Across Wildcat Canyon, the Seaview Trail narrows to a singletrack and descends through a thick forest. It ends soon after at the Curran Trail. Make a slight right to follow a connector up to Nimitz Way.



Left: Mount Diablo in the distance, as seen from Nimitz Way

At the parking lot, turn left onto the paved trail, climbing gently. This trail is very popular with cyclists, walkers, and joggers. Nimitz Way vaguely follows the ridgeline, sometimes descending slightly into the trees, sometimes climbing to sunny overlooks east toward Briones or west toward Wildcat Canyon. It's easy to track your progress by the markers every quarter mile along the trail. After almost two miles on Nimitz Way, turn left onto the Wildcat Peak Trail, near the northern edge of Tilden. The Wildcat Peak Trail makes its way first through the Rotary Club Grove and then steeply upward onto an exposed ridge, near Wildcat Peak (1,213 feet). The peak itself is a short detour to the right from the trail but is well worth it. This view contests with Vollmer Peak and the Seaview Trail Overlook in scope, extending north beyond San Pablo Bay toward Sonoma and Napa Counties, west past San Francisco to the ocean, east toward the Central Valley, and south over miles of parkland. Leave the expansive views and the ridge for good as you descend from Wildcat Peak into the forests of Wildcat Canyon. At the bottom of the spur to the summit, continue straight, down the Wildcat Peak Trail. After 0.7 miles steeply downhill, take a slight left on the Sylvan Trail, then turn left again onto the wide, gravel Loop Rd. After a half mile on this wide trail, you'll come out at a gate, then continue down along the dirt road until you reach the Lone Oak Picnic Area. Make a left past the water fountain (a good spot to refill) onto the Wildcat Gorge Trail. After a short stint through a meadow you'll return to the woods, passing several small pools and waterfalls, which transform into roaring cascades after a heavy rainfall. After the intersection with the Curran Trail, the trail ascends through a redwood grove, and you can opt to detour to the right toward a waterfall. This waterfall is huge just after heavy rain, but barely a trickle a week later. The Gorge Trail climbs a final steep hill to end at Lake Anza, the only place where Wildcat Creek has been dammed. Turn left to walk along the eastern shore of the placid lake. Lake Anza is a popular hiking and swimming destination and a great place for people-watching. Stay right to follow the shore of the small lake, then, halfway around, bear left onto the Wildcat Gorge Trail, which restarts here. The trail follows Wildcat Creek upstream on the eastern side, passing small waterfalls and a lovely stand of redwood trees. You'll then cross the creek and switchback up a hillside, staying left to reach Anza View Rd, which runs below the Brazil Building. Turn right and follow it to Wildcat Canyon Rd, then cross and continue through the gate up the Selby Trail, which switchbacks up through the woods, Cross Shasta Rd. at the end of the first segment of trail and continue another scenic $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile up the Selby Trail to where it ends at Golf Course Drive. A right turn brings you back to your starting point in a matter of seconds. Congratulations on the successful completion of this long and hilly walk!