

Where to experience the outdoors in the Berkeley/Albany/El Cerrito/Kensington area

Getting outdoors for health and exercise is important for mental as well as physical well-being, as we share the effort of trying to slow the spread of the highly contagious coronavirus. At the same time, **avoiding exposure and spread is vital to slowing contagion**, to protect lives and so that our health system and economy do not collapse.

You can help by **choosing outdoor spots that are close to home and uncrowded**, where all can keep safe distance – six feet from those you do not live with. While open spaces remain accessible, **expect playgrounds, play structures, playing fields, ball courts, restrooms and other buildings, and some parking areas to be closed.**

This handout and F5C's *[Creek walks in the Berkeley/Albany/El Cerrito/Kensington area](#)*, briefly describe some areas where you can savor nature in Berkeley, Albany, Kensington, and El Cerrito. Please check current restrictions. Suggestions are welcome at f5creeks@gmail.com.

Trails, paths, and steps: [Berkeley Path Wanderers Association](#) sells an excellent map of the city's more than 100 public paths and staircases, showing parks, creeks, and many details. Their web site describes [routes of past guided walks](#). [El Cerrito Trail Trekkers' web site](#) provides a map and description of El Cerrito trails, as well as a map of Kensington paths. Long, woody hill trails abound in the UC's fire roads and East Bay Regional Parks, below.

Two long trails provide level, long-distance walking and cycling in the flatlands: The [Santa Fe Right of Way](#) and Ohlone Greenway (BART right-of-way) run from Bancroft Avenue in Berkeley well into Richmond (via the Richmond Greenway). The [San Francisco Bay Trail](#) offers walking and cycling close to the Bay from Emeryville to Richmond (Albany's link through Golden Gate Fields race track parking is passable and due for completion soon.)

El Cerrito: A map and list of El Cerrito parks with descriptions is [here](#). Canyon Trails and Huber Parks offer short walks through lovely natural areas. Arlington Park and adjacent [Camp Herms](#) (belonging to the Boy Scouts and usually open) are other possibilities. From limited parking at the top of Rifle Range Road, you can walk down into Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, with long-range connections.

The many entrances and trails of 100-acre Hillside Natural Area lead to with meadows, oak groves, and panoramic views. Some trails are service roads; others are steep or narrow. Use the [Trail Trekkers map](#). Friends of Five Creeks provides a [slide show of Hillside Natural Area wildflowers](#) and a list of native plants.

Kensington: Sunset View Cemetery is popular for quiet strolling and splendid views ([map here](#)). Blake Garden, showcase belonging to the UC Berkeley Department of Landscape Architecture, is closed during the pandemic.

Albany: For a city of one square mile, Albany has amazing natural areas. Walks along Cerrito and Codornices Creeks edge the city (see [creek walks handout](#)). South of Cerrito Creek, woods and meadows of [Albany Hill](#) create an amazing oasis of native plants and wildlife. Use Google or another Internet map for access; expect limited parking. Trails vary from the wheel-chair-accessible summit trail that begins at the top of Taft Street to the steep, narrow dirt trail up the north slope, edged by poison oak. Information on plants, wildlife, and history, including generations of citizen effort to protect the hill, are [here](#) and [here](#).

Finally, Albany Beach and Bulb, entered from the foot of Buchanan Street, are a surreal wonderland – a peninsula built of dumped debris, vibrant with colorful weeds and ephemeral, often impudent art. To the south, a sandy beach, beloved by dogs and their keepers, formed as the new land blocked currents. On the north, tide flats are rich in migrating birds fall through spring. Beach, base, and neck of the Bulb are part of [McLaughlin Eastshore State Park](#), created as a result of 20 years of citizen effort and run by the East Bay Regional Park District. The bulbous tip is owned by the city. [Love the Bulb](#) (link has a map) is striving to keep its somewhat anarchic, art-filled wildness. Expect limited parking; the Bulb and beach are very popular.

Berkeley: Berkeley has dozens of parks, A [clickable index](#) leads to addresses, descriptions, and background. A [map](#) is indexed with links to photos and basics on major parks. A [large printable map is here](#).

Waterfront parks: Links and loops in these parks can provide miles of walks and bike rides. Beginning from the south, Emeryville border along the Bay, a sandy beach has built up because landfill peninsulas blocked currents. (In Berkeley, essentially all land west of the I-80 freeway is landfill or former dump.) The Bay Trail edges the beach and continues north, linking to the Marina area and Albany. To the east, Aquatic Park holds three lagoons formed by construction of the Eastshore Highway (today's I-80 freeway), made into a park during the Great Depression. Two-thirds of the park's 100 acres are water, rich in bird life. A 2.3-mile paved trail loops the main lagoon. At its north end, a pedestrian-bicycle bridge leads to parks south of University Avenue.

Back on the Bay side of the freeway, the land edging "Brickyard Cove" and continuing almost to University Avenue are fenced pending opening as part of [McLaughlin Eastshore State Park](#). South of University Avenue, a small sandy beach and a strip of land extending west along the Bay flank the pipe that is the mouth of Strawberry Creek, just west of Sea Breeze Delicatessen (lots of parking). A paved bicycle-pedestrian trail on the south side of University Avenue leads to the Marina area, where you'll find Shorebird Park (beach and grassy areas) and Bay views.

On the north side of University Avenue just west of the I-80 frontage road, the 72-acre Berkeley "Meadow," a former garbage dump, is now wildlife habitat with willow groves, grasslands, rainy-season ponds, with a "T" of fenced, level trails. Dogs are forbidden. Between the "Meadow" and the marina, Marina Boulevard leads to grassy, 90-acre [Cesar Chavez Park](#), another former dump, with loop trails along the water and areas for flying kites or tossing a ball. North of the "Meadow" and a wide, level dirt trail linking Marina Boulevard and the I-80 frontage road, a pre-WW II garbage dump, now called the North Basin Strip and part of [McLaughlin Eastshore State Park](#), can be circled on a dirt and gravel trail. Citizen volunteers have replaced the waterfront's tall weeds with often-colorful natives. A small salt marsh has formed near the pipe where Schoolhouse Creek empties into the Bay. Artists and others enjoy beachcombing for glass weathering out of the old landfill. Birdwatching can be excellent.

Northeast Berkeley parks: You can take beautiful walks in Codornices and Live Oak Parks (see creek walks handout), multi-level Glendale-La Loma Park, steep and woodsy John Hinkel Park, and close-together [Cragmont and Remillard Parks](#). See the [Berkeley Path Wanderers' map](#) and past walk routes for ways to link these. A lovely walk links smaller rock parks, fragments of ancient volcanoes. A handout on geology and history is [here](#).

Other Berkeley parks: Strawberry Creek Park, stretching from Addison to Bancroft along the old Santa Fe Right of Way, between Acton and Bonar, offers a beautiful meadow and a reach of Strawberry Creek freed from its culvert in the 1980s in one of California's first two "daylighting" projects. Grassy Ohlone Park, born of citizen protest, stretches along five blocks north of Hearst, from MLK Jr. to Sacramento (across from North Berkeley BART, with trail link there to the Ohlone Greenway and Santa Fe Right of Way). Oakland's Garber Park, across Claremont Avenue from the Claremont Hotel, provides steep walks in beautiful native forest. [Map and directions here](#).

UC Berkeley fire trails: In the Southeast Berkeley hills, enjoy miles of often steep walks and runs (no bicycling) on UC Berkeley's fire roads, with connections to longer routes. [Map here includes adjacent Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve](#). The most convenient entrances may be the small parking area on Centennial Drive below the UC Botanical Garden, parking for the Space Sciences Research Institute off upper Centennial Drive, and Claremont Avenue below Grizzly Peak Boulevard (very limited parking)

The East Bay Regional Park District: [Flyers and maps](#) are here for Tilden and Wildcat Regional Parks, bordering our area on the east; the lightly-used Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve, and other East Bay regional parks. You also can download and print ideas for [parks by city](#), [short loop trails](#), [bicycle loop trails](#), and other specialized information, such as on [fishing](#) and [wildflowers](#). Check www.ebparks.org for current closures of facilities, parks, and parking lots.

Note: Written during COVID-10 pandemic, but list is still useful.