



Sam McDonald County Park Self-guided Tour

Sam McDonald Park offers the opportunity to experience contrasting natural environments. The northwestern half is a lush redwood forest. The 450-acre southeastern portion is primarily open ridge, grassy knolls and patchy brush areas. Vistas of the Butano and Skyline Ridges, and the Pacific Ocean can be seen from this ridge. **Start your tour at the Main Parking Lot and take either Junction 12, 13, or 15.**

Self-guided Tour Routes (Approximate Time):

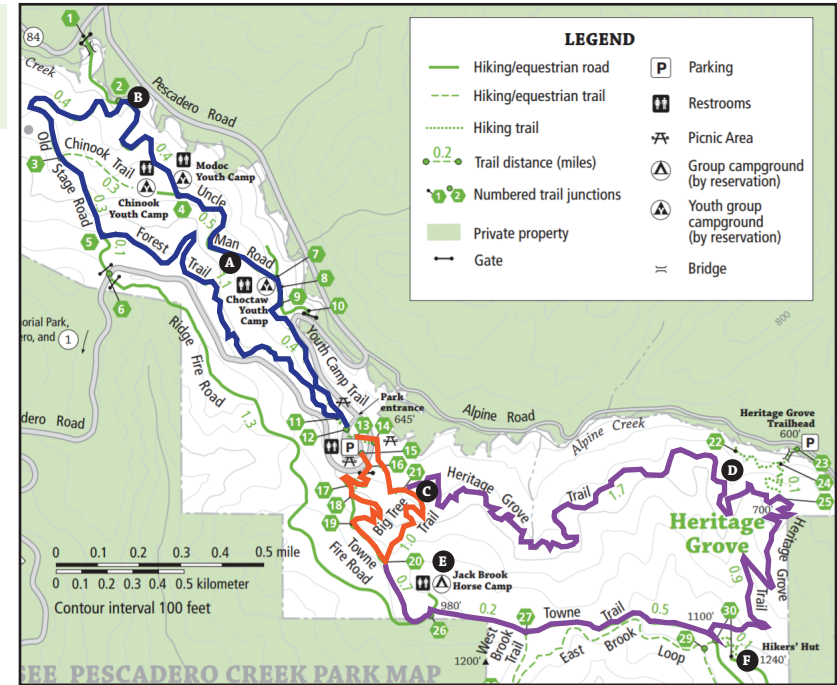
- Towne Fire Road to Big Tree Trail to Heritage Grove Trail – 1.2 miles (45 mins)
- Youth Camp Trail to Uncle Man Road to Old Stage Road to Forest Trail – 3.1 miles (2.5 hours)
- Heritage Grove Trail to Towne Fire Road – 5.0 miles (3.5 hours)



Sam McDonald and the Farm:

Sam McDonald was born in Louisiana in 1884, the fifth of seven children and son of former slaves. He left his family at 16 and settled in the Santa Clara Valley. He was the first African American to hold a major administrative position at an American University as the superintendent of athletic buildings and grounds at Stanford. In 1917 he purchased property in the redwoods becoming the first African American to do so. He built a home that he named “Chee Chee Wah Wah” (pictured below), Native American for “little squirrel.” Sam loved the land and considered it a weekend and holiday retreat where he often hosted parties for colleagues and students.

During his 51-year career at Stanford University, he became a well-respected and loved person who once held the record for the longest tenured employee at the “Farm.”



A: Youth Camps: Sam McDonald’s Legacy:

The Chinook, Choctaw and Modoc Youth Campsites seen here are available for day or overnight use exclusively for youth organizations including scouts, schools and summer youth programs. These sites reflect Sam McDonald’s desire that the land be used and enjoyed by children as they were his passion in life, especially those at the Stanford Convalescent Home (Sam pictured above with the children). “The children of the hospital are my family,” said Sam who spent most Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays with them. His property was bequeathed to the Stanford Convalescent Home which later sold it to San Mateo County Parks in 1970.

B: Alpine and San Gregorio Creeks:

Alpine Creek, which can be seen from the trail, feeds into San Gregorio Creek which begins north of Sam McDonald Park and empties into the Pacific Ocean at San Gregorio Beach. The creek mouth served as a campsite for Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola’s expedition which went onto Pacifica where he ascended Sweeney Ridge and “discovered” San Francisco Bay. The creek once served as breeding habitat for Coho Salmon and Steelhead Trout until development led to impassable barriers for the fish and depleted populations.



C: Coastal Redwood:

Coastal Redwood trees, the California State tree, can grow to be the tallest on earth. These evergreens can produce bark up to a foot thick which protects them from insect and fire damage. Coastal Redwoods have adapted to life along the fog belts of the Western coast of North America. They condense the fog's moisture on their needles and allow it to drip to the forest floor where it hydrates their shallow roots even in dry summers.

Look around for a clump of redwoods in a circular shape. These circles, often called "fairy rings," grow around the roots of a fallen tree. Redwoods can reproduce asexually from the base of older or fallen redwoods.



Douglas irises bloom in shades of purple and white during the spring.

D: Heritage Grove:

By the 1900s, most of the old-growth redwoods in San Mateo County had been logged. One grove along Alpine Road adjoining Sam McDonald Park remained. In 1966 the land was sold and scheduled for cutting until local resident Grace Radwell led an effort to block logging. Radwell raised \$80,000 to save the trees and in 1974 the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted to fund the remaining amount needed for the purchase. Redwood trees in Heritage Grove reach up to 280 feet in height and 12 feet in diameter.



E: Jack Brook Horse Camp:

Jack Brook, a San Mateo County Parks director from 1971 to 1977, was instrumental in acquiring the Heritage Grove area of this park. Take a quick detour to the horse camping facility that was built and named in his honor. The camp features three spots with BBQs, horse corrals, restrooms, and showers. Reservations can be made through www.smcoparks.org or 650-363-4021.



F: Hiker's Hut:

The Sierra Club's Hiker's Hut is dedicated in memory of Ollie Mayer who purchased a prefabricated kit from Denmark and hired two Danish carpenters to assemble the hut. It has housed an estimated 40,000 visitors since opening in 1977. The hut accommodates up to 10 people and provides bathrooms, a complete kitchen, and wood stove. For reservations, contact: hikershut@earthlink.net or call 650-390-8411.



When you're done with your tour, please return this guide to the kiosk for the next visitor. If you find this guide, please return it to: Memorial Park, 9500 Pescadero Creek Road, Loma Mar, CA 94021

Sam McDonald Park is a part of **San Mateo County Parks**, which manages parks, preserves, trails, and historic sites throughout the county to preserve public lands and provide opportunities for education and recreation.

For more information, visit www.SMCoParks.org.

San Mateo County Parks
Wild places & friendly spaces