The Creek Walk

This walk follows Richard's Road Trail through rolling terrain along West Union Creek in Huddart Park. It is one mile long one way, for a total distance of two miles, and ends where the trail crosses the creek.

To start the walk, enter Huddart Park from Kings Mountain Road in Woodside. Past the entry station (where there is a $5 parking fee), turn right at the stop sign and continue about 1/3 mile to the Redwood Area, where you can park. From there, bear left and walk down the road marked "Authorized Vehicles Only." You'll pass between East and West Meadow, then out to an open lawn where the self-guided walk begins. Richard's Road Trail starts at the gate marked "Fire Road."

The Watershed

The San Francisquito watershed, comprising an area of around 47.5 miles, is drained by San Francisquito Creek and its many tributaries, including West Union Creek. The watershed contains parts of five municipalities, two counties, and several habitats. It is one of the last free-flowing creeks on the Peninsula and is home to a native run of steelhead trout.

During your walk you'll see ways in which human activity has shaped the creek. What kinds of activities continue to do so now?

Suggestions & Reminders

Be prepared — bring water, wear comfortable walking shoes, and dress in layers. Always use common sense and follow park rules and regulations. Do not disturb plants or animals or hike off-trail.

San Francisquito
Watershed Council

The San Francisquito Watershed Council is a nonprofit stewardship organization dedicated to fostering the health and diversity of the San Francisquito watershed.

www.SanFrancisquito.org
650-961-1035
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The San Francisquito Watershed Council receives 501(c)3 fiscal sponsorship from Acterra.

Drawings of the Coast redwood and its branches courtesy of Sempervirens Fund. Oak drawing by Paula McKenzie Nelsen. Steelhead pool drawing adapted from the Santa Clara Valley Water District "Stream Care Guide," original by Suzanne Bauer. All other drawings by Katie Pilat.

This brochure was funded by a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy.

SFWC ♻ 2006

Natural History Guide & Self-Guided Walk

West Union Creek, Huddart Park

San Francisquito
Watershed Council

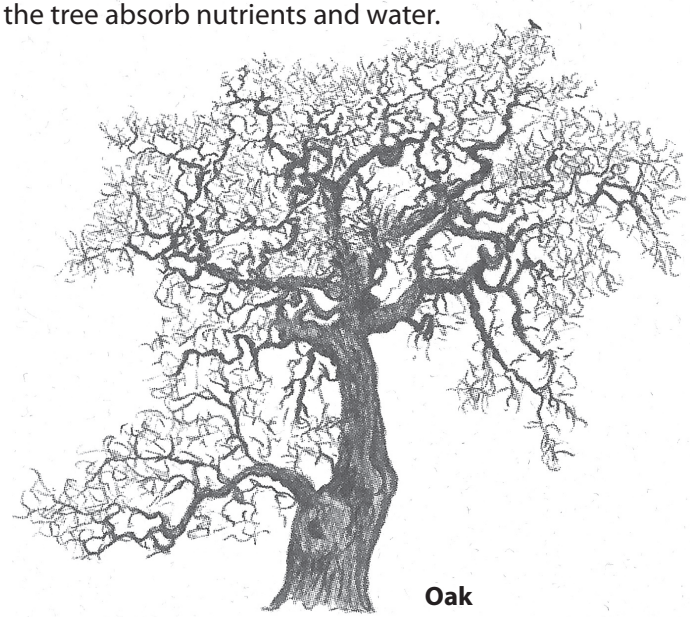
Self-Guided Walk
West Union Creek, Huddart Park

Habitats

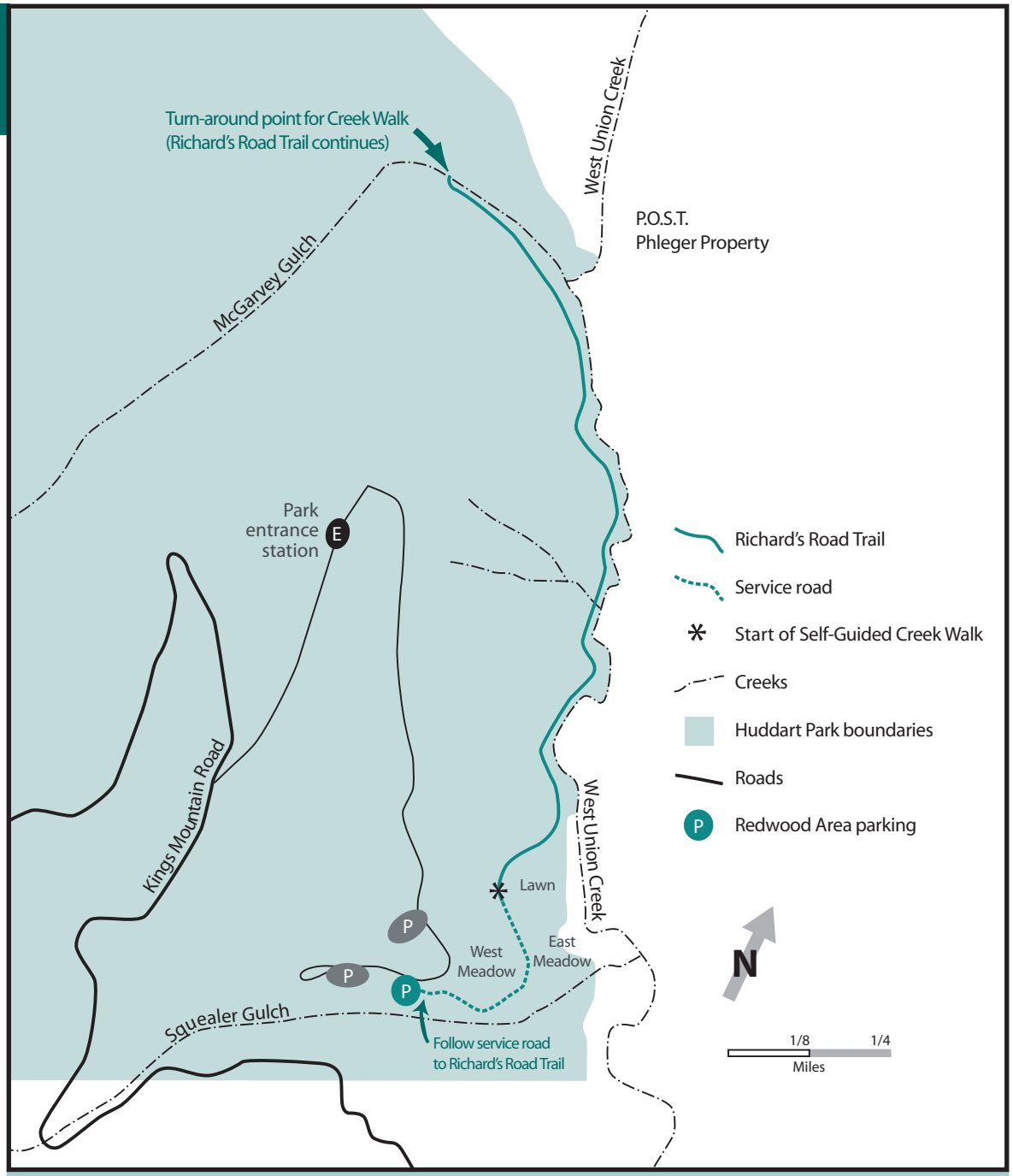
The West Union watershed includes three dominant habitats: mixed evergreen forest, oak woodland, and chaparral. Observe the oak woodlands on the drier hillside to the left as you arrive at the lawn area. Here you find the evergreen coast live oak and the deciduous black oak, along with California bay laurels and madrones. Throughout oak woodlands, you will see and hear Western scrub jays, acorn woodpeckers, and squirrels. Mixed evergreen forests, nurtured by rain and fog, are home to redwoods and Douglas firs. Chaparral, which is found in the upland areas of the watershed, is dominated by shrubby species such as chamise, manzanita, and ceanothus that grow well in dry areas with poor, rocky soil.

Beneficial fungi

To the left of the lawn area there is an oak grove. Look for lichen growing on the trunks and branches. Lichen needs fog and good air quality to thrive. Below ground, another fungus, mycorrhiza, lives among the oak roots and helps the tree absorb nutrients and water.



Oak



Huddart Park • *San Mateo County, CA*

West Union Creek

After passing through the gate marked "Fire Road," you'll see a creek on your right, which is West Union. This creek drains an area of about seven square miles and is a tributary of Bear Creek. It flows generally southeast through the San Andreas fault zone. Although the creek is mostly dry during the summer, several deeper pools remain year-round. These pools are fed by underground aquifers.

Coast redwoods

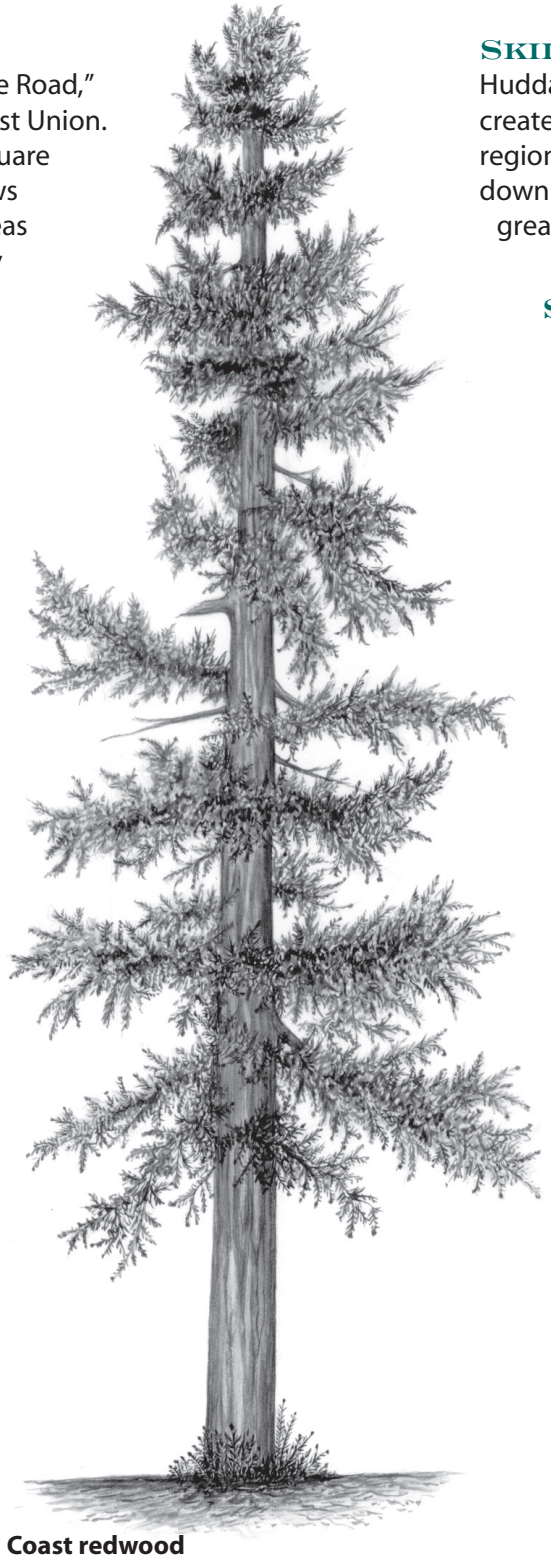
The coast redwood is the tallest tree on Earth. This majestic giant requires moderate temperatures and a year-round supply of water. Its botanical name, *Sempervirens*, means "ever living." The Skyline area, including Huddart Park, was logged in the 1850s and 1860s; the redwoods you see along the creek are second-growth trees. Look carefully to find remnant stumps that show the regenerative powers of the redwood. New trees sprout from the original trees' root systems in rings surrounding the stumps.

Redwood sorrel

Native redwood sorrel, also called oxalis, carpets the redwood forest floor. In spring and summer, the plant has white to pink flowers nestled among clover-like leaves. At night, light receptors in the leaves cause them to fold up like a book.

Grasses

While not much grows beneath the towering redwoods, here you may find California sweetgrass, an erect bunch grass known for its showy white flowers and the vanilla smell of its leaves. Grasses have massive root systems that help prevent erosion.



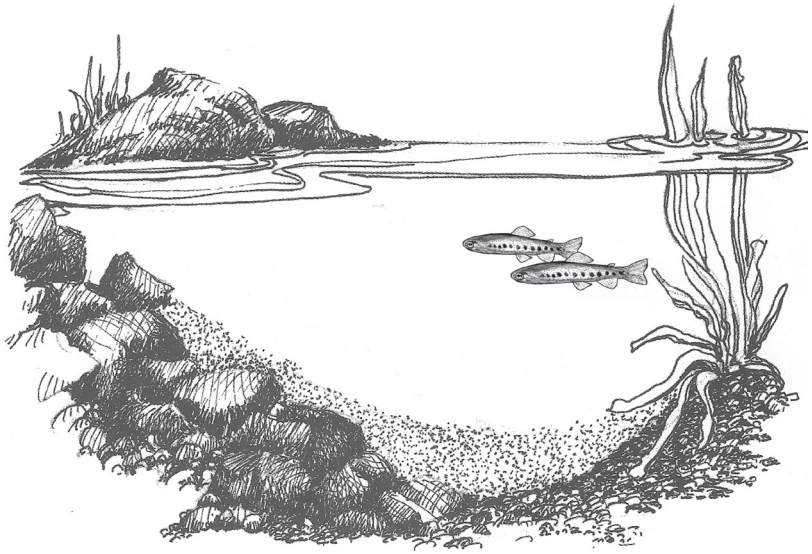
Coast redwood

Skid road

Huddart Park was once part of a land grant, Rancho Cañada de Raymundo, created by the Mexican government in 1840. In the 1850s and 1860s, this region was logged heavily for fir and redwood. Freshly cut timber was slid downhill to the sawmill on skid roads, which were made of logs that had been greased. Remnants of the old skid roads are still visible throughout the park.

Steelhead

Steelhead are the anadromous form of rainbow trout, which means they are born in freshwater creeks such as this one, migrate to the ocean to mature, then return to the creek of their birth to spawn. Juveniles live in the creek for two or three years before migrating to the ocean. They spend the summer hiding in deep pools that have water throughout the year. The young fish, called smolt, migrate to the Bay in March and April. Although they are rarely seen, adults migrate upstream after storms from January through March. To survive, steelhead need clean, cool, oxygen-rich water. They also need gravel to spawn in and larger rocks to provide shelter. Logjams and overhanging banks, which provide shelter from predators, are good places to look for steelhead. Steelhead are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and are protected by law.



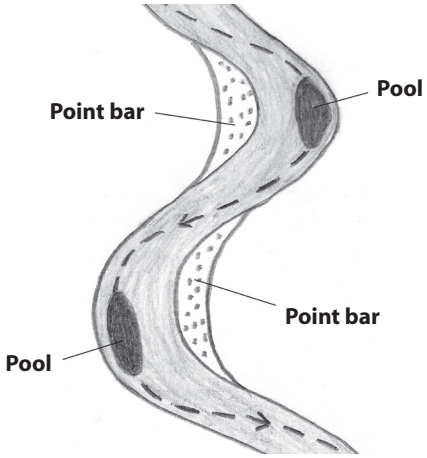
Juvenile steelhead in pool

Erosion

The banks of West Union Creek are made of loose sedimentary soils and are prone to erosion caused by the area's high-intensity storms. Hillside erosion processes include landslides and gullying. Grading and development on or near the creek can also increase erosion and result in higher sediment loads in the creek. Look for signs of creek bank and hillside erosion.

Riffles and pools

West Union Creek is seasonal and dries up during the summer and fall. When the creek is flowing, look for riffles and pools. Riffles are shallow sections of the creek where water flows rapidly over a rocky or gravelly streambed. These areas are important because they oxygenate the water and provide habitat for aquatic insects, which are food for steelhead. Steelhead build their nests, called "redds," in riffles. A pool is a deep area where the water flows more slowly. Steelhead need pools for resting and for hiding from predators.



Meanders and point bars

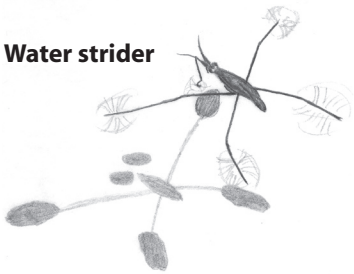
As the creek meanders, the water moves fastest around the outsides of the bends and slowest on the insides. Over time, the faster water erodes the creek bottom, creating deeper pools on the outside of the bends. Sediment carried in the slower-moving water is deposited on the inside of the bend, creating what is called a point bar. Look for a meander and find a point bar deposit – both are evidence of the constant change in a natural environment.

Natural dams

Logjams and piles of woody debris are important natural features. Look for one in the creek. These can create natural dams behind which gravel beds form, providing places for steelhead to lay eggs. They also cause deep pools to form, providing shady protected areas for juvenile fish.

Water striders

These insects move using surface tension to stay on top of the water. They hunt by sensing the vibrations emitted when prey insects fall into the creek. From this stimulus they can sense not only which direction to go, but also the size and condition of the prey.


Water strider

Indian warrior

This showy perennial wildflower has stout green or reddish stems and fern-shaped leaves. It produces flower spikes that range from deep red to bright pink; they may be seen in various stages of bloom from February to June, but viewing is best in March. Indian warrior is a hemiparasite that attaches itself to the roots of a wide variety of plants including oaks and toyons. Look for it along the edges of trees and shrubs.

Sword fern

Maidenhair fern

Goldback fern

Ferns

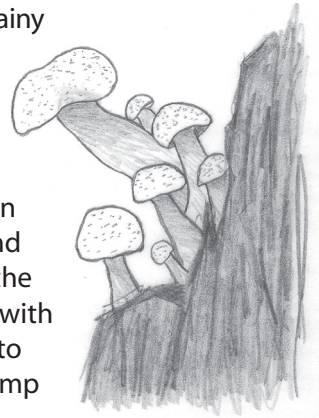
The redwood forests are a haven for ferns. These vascular plants have well-developed veins and reproduce from spores. Because they need water to reproduce, they are commonly found in moister areas. Notice how the number of ferns increases as you go upstream. Sword ferns are the most common fern in Huddart Park. Look also for licorice ferns growing out of moss on rocks and trees, and for delicate maidenhair ferns on the forest floor. The goldback fern, found in the rainy season, quickly goes dormant when the rains cease.

California newts

These salamanders can grow up to eight inches long. You'll recognize them by their dull brown color and dry, warty skin. When frightened, the newt arches its back and reveals a shocking yellow or orange underbelly, warning enemies that it is poisonous. Never touch a California newt for this reason. The newts found in the San Francisquito watershed are the subspecies known as the Coast Range newt. You might spot them in or near the creek during the rainy season. They spend the drier months underground.

Mushrooms

Mushrooms are the fruit of fungi that grow on decomposed organic matter. They appear only when certain levels of moisture, humidity, temperature, and nutrients are present. In fall and winter, look under the redwoods for the large redwood rooter mushroom with its yellowish-brown cap. In winter, you may be able to spot the reddish-orange waxy cap mushroom in damp areas.


Waxy cap mushroom