



Hidden Valley Open Space below Mt. Diablo at left, with the Tassajara Ridge Trail at center, and Highland Ridge and the Tassajara Valley at right (Scott Hein)

SELF-GUIDING HIKE

Some of the Best Views You've Never Seen

Brand New Hidden Valley Open Space & the Threatened Tassajara Valley

By George Phillips & Seth Adams



Trails: Tassajara Ridge to Hidden Valley Ridge to Hidden Valley Park back to start. **Distance, Elevation Gain/Loss:** **Hike 1)** 1 mile round trip (350' gain/loss), **Hike 2)** 3.5 mile there and back (650' gain/loss), **Hike 3)** 4.5 mile full loop (800' gain/loss). **Time:** 1-3 hours **Start:** for best views, park near hiker gate on Longleaf Circle, San Ramon. **Notes:** 15-20 minutes to one of the best Mt. Diablo views you'll ever see. Evening walks highly recommended, cool or windy days, or early morning. No shade. Restrooms/water at Hidden Valley Park.

Hidden Valley Open Space (HVOS) is amazing! A tilted 1,000 acre grassland bowl at the northeast corner of the Windemere development in San Ramon, the Open Space and its creeks drain to Hidden Valley Park. It is almost circled by exposed ridges; in just a few minutes' walk you can reach world class views of the urban Tri-Valley, and of Mt. Diablo and lands to the east. At sunset, views are truly spectacular.

Approved in 1992, Windemere and Gale Ranch are the 5,979 acre, 11,000 unit Dougherty Valley development. Fifty-five percent of Windemere is open space, with 12.5 miles of trail. Parks, trails and open space are just coming online; most of them are unknown. HVOS connects to other Dougherty open spaces, north to Alamo Creek open space—a trail there will lead north toward Mt. Diablo—and south to Windemere Parkway, where the Tassajara Ridge Staging Area is under construction.

The center of HVOS is reserved for wildlife: San Joaquin kit fox, tiger salamander, red-legged frog, and burrowing owl. The grassland, with its ground squirrel and rodent populations, and the ridges which force wind currents upward combine to attract lots of raptors: kites, kestrels, hawks, owls and golden eagles—on our last visit we saw a kite and two burrowing owls 'kiting' or hovering along the ridge.

Start **Hike 1** at the hiker gate across from 2187 Longleaf Circle, 700' elevation. Follow the concrete drainage ditch and fence, right, until you reach the Tassajara Ridge Trail, leading left/north up the hill. It's a little steep but as you rise the hill behind drops revealing Las Trampas and Pleasanton Ridges connecting through Sunol to the Ohlone Wilderness with Mission and McGuire Peaks, and the Santa Cruz Mountains. Afternoons are windy, chances are you'll have the preserve to yourself.

A 5-10 minute walk and the agricultural Tassajara Valley is revealed at right, a development battleground for years (see *Save the Tassajara Valley*, p. 1). Spur ridges drop east/right away from Hidden Valley; the first is the proposed Corrie Creekside cemetery. Beyond, north of this spur ridge, the proposed 'New Farm' development stretches east and north past the Open Space's northern boundary, then across Camino Tassajara east of Blackhawk.

The stark contrast between Windemere and the agriculture visible in the Tassajara Valley are a result of the Urban Limit Line (ULL) (see map p. 10) which is intended to protect agricultural land and open space from urban development. For decades developers have proposed projects in the Tassajara Valley and met strong resistance from residents, community leaders and conservation organizations.

At the first trail crest, climb left straight up hill to the top of a 1050' knoll (a trail spur/sign ahead leads you back, but starting from the crest is better). In 15-20 minutes you've reached world class views: Mount Diablo jumps up to the north with the northern ridge of Hidden Valley at left.

Facing Diablo turn clockwise; Blackhills (for dark chaparral) stretch right/east to Highland Ridge, Tassajara Valley/hills below, and dark-capped Brushy Peak above, to Altamont Pass. The Diablo range and Arroyo Del Valle stretch south and west though the Ohlone Wilderness to Sunol and Mission Peak, Pleasanton Ridge at right. Continue turning; Calaveras Ridge and Las Trampas stretch north to Briones.

Development stretches southwest from the Urban Limit Line, and open space and ag lands north and east. This balance is a key in our collective quality of life and in maintaining both the natural beauty we all treasure and viable agriculture and wildlife habitat. East across the Tassajara Valley, another new East Bay Regional Park District preserve is planned, "Tassajara Hills/Doolan Canyon," a greenbelt between North Livermore and East Dublin. You can return to the start now for a 1 mile round trip, or head north for longer walk.

Hike 2 - As you head down, the picturesque trail pulls you magnetically along. The ridge trail hugs the eastern boundary of HVOS then turns left at its northeast corner. Alamo Creek project grading appears across the protected ravine to the north and you can clearly see the effects of the ULL. Development stops and low density agricultural land starts. The voter-approved ULL controls where development should take place. It continues across Camino Tassajara along the eastern boundary of Blackhawk and up toward Diablo's Oyster Point. If you turn around now, your round trip is 3.5 miles.

Hike 3 - Or follow the loop left/west; it becomes the Hidden Valley Ridge Trail, circling past a water tank. Follow the road down to Ivy Hill Way and stay on the fire trail as the road circles southeast to Albion Road, until you're forced onto the sidewalk. You will pass Hidden Valley Park on your left. Before Windemere Pkwy., a gate into a neighborhood will lead you left, another left on Longleaf Circle, and back to the start.



Join Us on One of Our Guided Hikes

- Saturday November 7, 2009, 9:30 am.** Led by Seth Adams, SMD's Director of Land Programs
- Sunday December 6, 2009, 9:30 am.** Led by Troy Bristol, SMD's Land Conservation Associate
- Saturday January 16, 2010, 9:30 am.** Led by Troy Bristol, SMD's Land Conservation Associate
- Sunday February 21, 2010, 9:30 am.** Led by Scott Hein, Chair of SMD's Land Committee
- Sunday March 21, 2010, 9:30 am.** Led by Troy Bristol, SMD's Land Conservation Associate
- Sunday April 11, 2010, 9:30 am.** Led by Seth Adams, SMD's Director of Land Programs

All hikes begin at hiker gate across from 2187 Longleaf Circle in San Ramon. Bring water, layers and sunscreen.