

I HIKED THEM ALL

by Steve Smith, MDIA President
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Hiking is my passion. It sustains me, brings peace, provides adventure and satiates the explorer within. Hiking has been a part of me for most of my life, and so too has Mount Diablo. It wasn't until five years ago that I began to really devote my free time to this hobby which quite literally has its ups and downs. Exploring the trails has informed how I see myself and the world around me, and has brought me infinite joy and reward along the way.

I purchased my first *Trail Map of Mount Diablo State Park* from the visitor center and studied it, learning how the network of trails interconnected. Then I saw it: hanging on the wall of the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center was a t-shirt that had the map of the mountain on it and the words "Hike Them All" emblazoned across the bottom. One of the volunteer docents explained to me that there is an elite group of hikers who endeavor to hike every trail in the park and upon completion purchase the shirt and alter it to read "I Hiked Them All". I was sold on the idea, but I would have to wait to be sold the actual shirt. How hard could it be?

The first clue was in discovering that there are 162 miles of hiking trails in the park! So I developed a game plan. I would complete the challenge in one calendar year, I would hike every trail and utility road listed on the official park map, I would not trespass onto any private property without permission, and I would keep track of my progress along the way. Beginning in January 2016, I set off on the first of many outings, covering 8 miles and 1,800 feet of elevation that first day. When I got home, I got out my map and a pink highlighter and retraced my steps. It would become a much anticipated ritual following each hike, highlighting the trails I had completed and planning the route for the next adventure.

A couple of months into my quest, I learned from some hiking companions that there was a Volunteers in Parks Program (VIPPP) on the mountain. I completed a half-day training session and began volunteering as a backcountry docent, armed with a vest and the knowledge necessary to help out any lost or troubled hikers. I started encountering hundreds of other volunteers along the way. There were groups removing barbed wire and other debris as part of the Trash Removal Project (TRP). I ran into a large group of red-shirted volunteers who were part of the Trail Crew and learned that they maintained our trails twice a month. A small group who were handy with tools called the Maintenance Volunteer Group (MVG) was fixing some of the aging buildings and picnic areas. Still more were staffing the Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center as docents, while others were out leading nature hikes for the public. The list went on and on, and I was enamored by their conviction, passion and devotion to this state park.



CAMEL ROCK TRAIL | JACK MCKEOWN

All the while, my journey continued. It would take over 450 miles of hiking in order to cross off the vast network of trails in the park. I once hiked 17 miles just to cross off a remote 0.1 mile long trail at Windy Point. My well-worn map was soon covered in pink highlighter. Equally well-worn were my hiking boots, yet my mind and spirit were energized and invigorated. I had met so many wonderful people along the way and reignited a love affair I have had with this mountain my entire life. My final trail was Castle Rock Trail, and in September 2016 I was joined by 40 fellow hikers who shared in a milestone I will not soon forget. I was so entranced by being a part of the mountain that I wanted to become more involved in the interpretive side of the park and joined the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association in its mission of Preservation through Education. I write to you proudly as MDIA's newest Board President.

You certainly don't need to set out on a journey like mine in order to appreciate the sheer beauty of Mount Diablo. There are trails here for every hiker, casual or experienced. A great companion to our park map is the *Hiker's Guide to Mount Diablo*, available in our visitor centers and online for \$15. It has 50 spectacular hikes to embark on, from the 0.7 mile Mary Bowerman loop all the way up to our 26.2 mile (and 9,666 foot) Mount Diablo Marathon hike, and everything in between. It has route maps, elevation plots, descriptions of natural and cultural history as well as photographs of the scenery.

I urge you to get out on the trails today, as this time of year is spectacular with wildflowers and waterfalls to behold. Check out our website at mdia.org where we feature some of our premier hikes that you can print out and take along with you. Or download our Audible Mount Diablo guides and take an audio tour of the mountain as you hike along the trail. And if you want to join the elite group who has hiked every trail, get out your highlighter and set your sights on that commemorative t-shirt!