

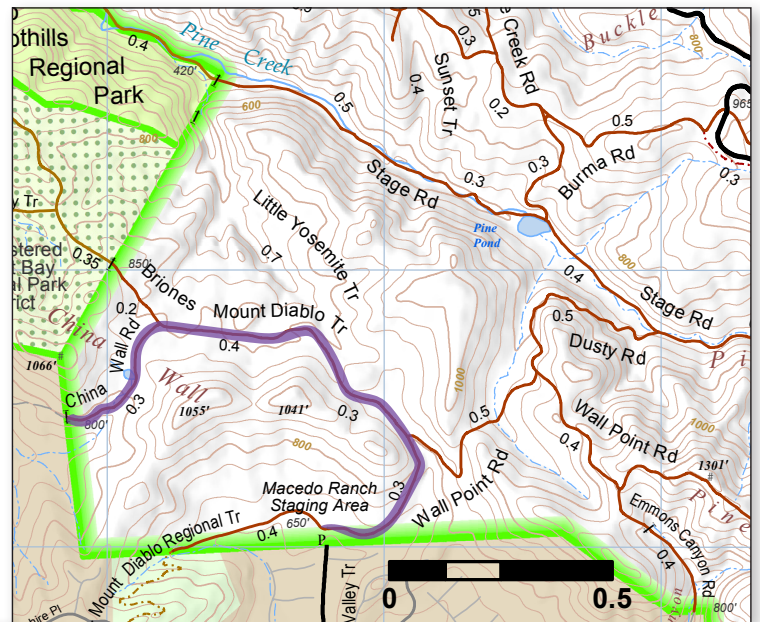
Frank's Favorite Hikes

CHINA WALL

by Frank Valle-Riestra

Reprinted from *Mountain News*, Spring/Summer 2010

There are, of course, all kinds of reasons for picking a particular hike as a favorite. It may be the memory of an unusually pleasant day in a hidden corner of the mountain bursting with spring's colorful growth. It may be an exceptionally challenging single-track trail meandering through a wonderland of rocks and breathtaking views. Or it may be a destination hike—a hike featuring some unusual climactic phenomenon that repeatedly draws you back. An excursion to China Wall is one such destination hike, and if you have never experienced China Wall, you owe it to yourself to devote a part of a beautiful day to explore this masterpiece of nature at the end of a short, pleasant walk.



The trailhead is at the Macedo Ranch Staging Area, at the end of Green Valley Road in Danville. There is a full complement of facilities, with extensive picnic grounds and a parking fee. Your walk begins along Wall Point Road; at the first road junction, continue straight ahead on Briones-Mount Diablo Regional Trail to its junction with China Wall Road. All junctions are well marked with trail identification posts. A short jaunt on China Wall Road takes you to your destination.

This approach walk has some pleasant scenery for you to enjoy. The topography is one of an undulating series of hills, grass-covered except for a few isolated large oaks. In spring there is no great variety of wildflowers to be seen, but the emerald-green grasses do harbor some fine stands of Ithuriel's Spear (*Triteleia laxa*), a showy brodiaea, which seems to compete successfully amid the tall stalks of the lush grasses. In summertime those lush grasses turn to pale gold, and the contrast between the pale gold on the high crests against the deep azure sky is truly stunning—nature's own

display of California's symbolic colors. Be aware that occasionally very strong winds do blow across the higher reaches of your route.

Soon enough your destination comes into view; a terminally eroded sandstone stratum, tilted into vertical position by the upthrust of Mount Diablo. With adjacent strata eroded away more rapidly, the remnant is, indeed, a wall-like structure running over hill and dale, just like its man-made equivalent in China. Take time to examine the grotesquely convoluted formations, sculpted by an imaginative Mother Nature; small paths made by previous explorers facilitate your examination. Note that the area encompasses other similarly eroded strata, none quite as spectacular as China Wall. Be on the lookout for birds, and with luck, you might spot some poorwills, which occasionally nest in the area. And if you are wondering why some land facing China Wall seems to be carefully leveled off—this is where Mount Diablo Interpretive Association's sister organization, Save Mount Diablo, holds its annual moonlight dinners.