

# MOUNT DIABLO REVIEW

MOUNT DIABLO INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION

FALL / WINTER 2023 • MDIA, PO Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346 • 925-927-7222 • www.mdia.org

## *The Mount Diablo Initial Point, Its History and Use*

Ever wonder how your property corners were initially established? Just look to the top of Mount Diablo for the answer.

Mount Diablo is the starting point for the establishment of land boundaries throughout most of Northern California and all of Nevada. The summit is the location of the “Initial Point,” the north/south meridian, and east/west baseline intersection point that is the basis for most property boundaries.

As part of the settlement of the Mexican War of 1846-1848, “ranchos,” or private land holdings established during Spanish and Mexican rule, were honored by the U.S. Government under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico. These ranchos, which were primarily along coastal areas of present-day California and in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys, covered 9 million acres, or 14,000 square miles. To delineate these private lands, the United States Deputy Surveyors were assigned to survey the rancho boundaries. During the 1850s more than 30 government survey parties were deployed.

While the rancho boundaries were being surveyed, plans were underway to begin subdividing federal land in the territory in accordance with the United States Public Land Survey System (USPLSS). The procedure for land surveys under the USPLSS was to establish a starting point, called an “initial point,” which becomes the intersection of true east/west, and north/south direction lines.

The original plan for California was to establish one initial point. But surveying the public lands in California was no easy task. Because of the size of the state and the steepness of terrain in many areas of California, the Surveyor General of the United States decided that three

initial points were needed. These points were established on Mount Diablo in Contra Costa County in 1851, on San Bernardino Mountain in San Bernardino County in 1852, and on Mount Pierce in Humboldt County in 1853. Once these grid lines were established, public lands were divided into six mile-square townships, and then further subdivided into one mile-square sections. These one-mile square sections are easily recognizable in rural areas of California, often being delineated by country roads and fence lines.



MOUNT DIABLO MERIDIAN, PHOTO BY STEVE SMITH

## ENJOY MOUNT DIABLO! by Cameron Morrison, MDSP Supervising Ranger



**IN RECENT YEARS, WE HAVE** experienced the global pandemic, severe drought, extreme rainfall, and unhealthy air quality from nearby fires, but one thing has remained a constant- the importance that outdoor recreation has on our emotional, physical, and mental well-being. Perhaps for these reasons, visitation at Mount Diablo State Park has increased

dramatically. Over the past two years, we have noticed that many first-time visitors have now become regular users of the park. Whether this is your first time at Mount Diablo State Park, or whether you consider yourself to be a regular user of the park, your visit will be enhanced if you know the park guidelines.

Mount Diablo State Park can provide you with great memories, amazing photos, new experiences, and more than one hundred miles of physically challenging trails to explore. However, for those unprepared, Mount Diablo can be a dangerous place. To enjoy the park safely, I ask that you follow all park rules, most of which are found on the last page of this newsletter. If you are driving on the paved roads throughout the park, follow all rules of the road and only pass bicyclists when safe and legal to do so. If you are spending the night or having a barbecue with friends or family, please follow all fire restrictions. If hiking or riding your bicycle in the backcountry, be sure to have plenty of water, leave your dog at home and hike or ride within your abilities. If you have a drone, it cannot be flown in the park where it disturbs wildlife. I hope that you enjoy your visit to Mount Diablo State Park, and you are able to make new memories, reconnect with nature, share an incredible photo with a friend or family member or return home with sore muscles and a new appreciation for all that Mount Diablo State Park has to offer. 🍁



2023 SUMMIT SNOW

## MDIA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN by Stephen Smith



**FALL AND WINTER ON THE** mountain are fabulous seasons in which to enjoy the splendors of Mount Diablo. You can take advantage of a quieter time on the trails, where everything slows down a little bit. Hike to a quiet spot, find a nice place to sit and simply take it in. Wildlife

abounds and will present itself all around you. Fall brings the reopening of the Castle Rock area which is closed part of the year so that MDIA's Peregrine Team can monitor and protect our nesting Peregrine Falcons. We're proud to say that we had 3 chicks successfully fledge this year! You can always spot some Black-tailed deer roaming about, particularly in the early morning mist or in the late evening sun. Stay long enough and you're likely to spot a Coyote leaping above the grass pouncing on its prey, or even a stealthy Bobcat slinking through the brush. Or you may just spot one of our Tarantulas roaming about the mountain looking for love.

There are so many wonderful creatures to look out for, and so much to learn about them. If you would like a fun and interesting way to learn about some of our wildlife, a great way to do so is through our Wild Mount Diablo video series. These are short 4-6-minute videos shot right here on the mountain detailing the often quirky, and always downright cute, behaviors of some of our most common residents. You can find these videos at [mdia.org/wild-mountdiablo](http://mdia.org/wild-mountdiablo). Some of our offerings include Black-tailed deer, Bobcats, American Kestrel, Ladybugs and so much more. So come check us out, our website has so much to offer in making your visit to the park a more enjoyable one.

The Mount Diablo Interpretive Association is an all-volunteer 501c3 non-profit cooperative association which helps to enhance the visitor experience here on the mountain. We do this through media like books & newsletters, multimedia videos & webinars, hikes & lectures, interpretive panels & brochures, and through support of our visitor centers. MDIA is currently fundraising to build a brand-new Education Center in Mitchell Canyon. Come to our website to learn more about donating or becoming a member and check us out on Facebook and Instagram.

Whatever you choose to do on the mountain, enjoy your time here and let nature be your healer. See you on the trail!



## Mount Diablo Survey Point Establishes Property Boundaries in California and Nevada

Because of its prominence on the Northern California landscape, Mount Diablo has also been used for important survey monuments by other government agencies including the Department of the Navy, the California Department of Natural Resources, and the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. In 1928, the Standard Oil Company of California built an aircraft landmark beacon near the summit of Mount Diablo. The beacon was a navigational aide for the oil company's ships plying the San Francisco Bay waterways. The lamp from that beacon still sits at the top of the rotunda of the Summit Museum and is lit each year to commemorate Pearl Harbor Day, Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

In July 1851, Col. Leander Ransom, General Land Office Deputy Surveyor, was under instructions from the Surveyor General for California to establish the initial point on Mount Diablo's Summit. In oppressive summer heat that year, he labored through dense brush up the steep terrain to get to the top of the mountain. There he chiseled a hole in solid rock on the highest point, and erected a flagpole to be used as a sight to establish monuments on the base and meridian lines. Ransom then went due south 12 miles and set additional monuments to establish the meridian line. He continued setting monuments due east, due north, and due west of the initial point on the summit of the mountain, thereby establishing the Mount Diablo Base and Meridian lines. Ransom began on July 17, 1851, and completed his survey on August 31, 1851.

One year later, in 1852, R. D. Cutts of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey traveled to the top of Mount Diablo on a mission to establish a survey marker for mapping surrounding waterways and topography. After finding Ransom's initial point set a year earlier, Cutts established his monument 3 feet to the southwest, on a flat ledge that was more suitable for setting up a tripod and survey instrument. He noted the relationship of the two points in his official notes, and included a sketch showing their relationship to each other. The point established by Cutts is now marked by a copper pin at the base of the concrete pillar on the museum floor.

In July of 1993, land surveyors from around California gathered on top of Mount Diablo to celebrate the installation of a new plaque commemorating the survey makers on the summit of Mount Diablo. The new plaque was placed at the base of the concrete pillar on the museum floor, and became a part of the newly renovated Summit Museum and Visitor Center opened by the California State Park Service in October, 1993.

In July 2001, land surveyors from around California and Nevada gathered on the summit of Mount Diablo, this time to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the setting of the Initial Point by Ransom. The Mount Diablo Surveyors Historical Society, in cooperation with the California State Park Service, hosted a commemorative celebration for the general public. There were numerous booths and displays, including antique surveying instruments used by land surveyors of Ransom's time, and many other educational activities. 🍁

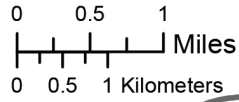
—By John W. Pettley, PLS

Want to learn more about the Mount Diablo Meridian and artifacts of the surveying profession? Check out The Mount Diablo Surveyors Historical Society at <https://www.mdshs.org/>



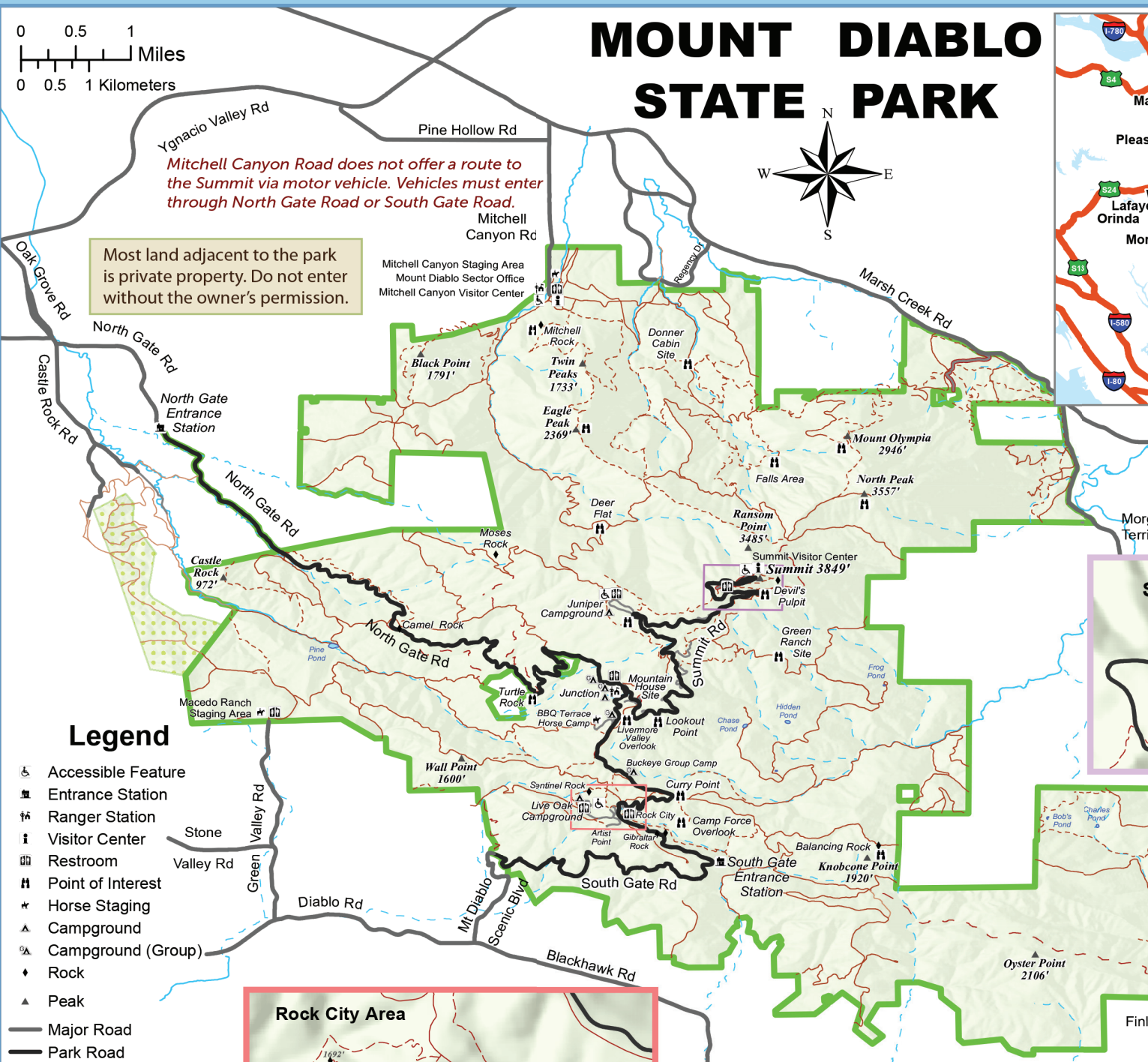
COMPASS INSIDE THE ROTUNDA ATOP THE SUMMIT VISITOR CENTER ALIGNED WITH TRUE NORTH. ENJOY THE VIEWS FROM THE VISITOR CENTER ROOFTOP. THE DISPLAY WAS A GIFT OF THE FAMILY OF NORMA AND FRANCES DENNING IN HONOR OF THEIR SERVICE TO THE COUNTRY AND MOUNT DIABLO.

# MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK



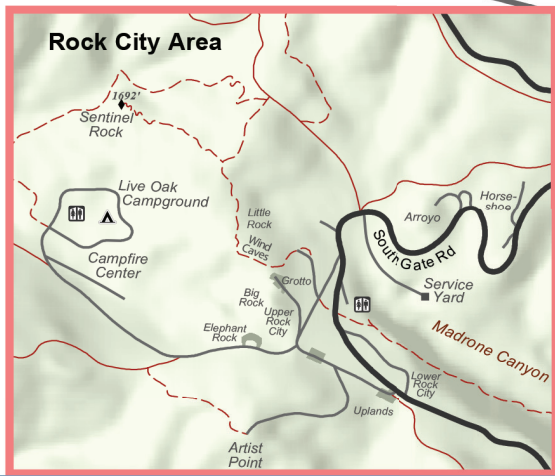
*Mitchell Canyon Road does not offer a route to the Summit via motor vehicle. Vehicles must enter through North Gate Road or South Gate Road.*

Most land adjacent to the park is private property. Do not enter without the owner's permission.



## Legend

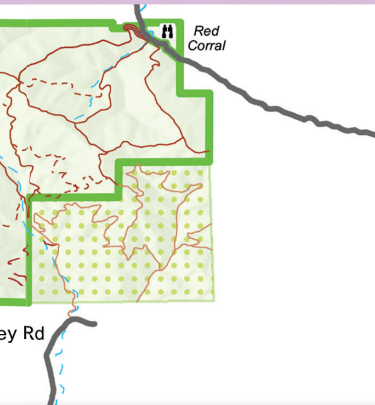
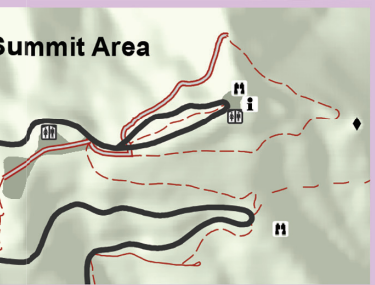
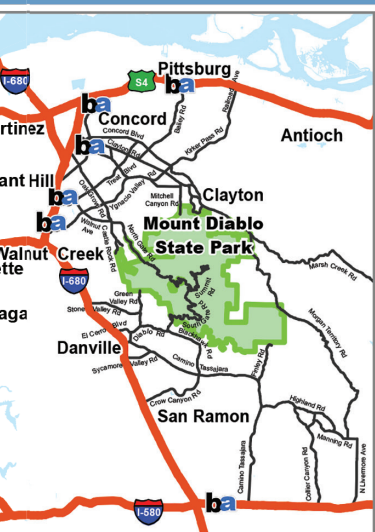
- Accessible Feature
- Entrance Station
- Ranger Station
- Visitor Center
- Restroom
- Point of Interest
- Horse Staging
- Campground
- Campground (Group)
- Rock
- Peak
- Major Road
- Park Road
- Fire Road
- non-MDSP
- Single-track Trail
- Trail Bikes OK
- Paved Trail
- Perennial Creek
- Seasonal Creek
- Pond
- Administered By EBRPD
- Mount Diablo State Park



Park Fees per Car	
Mitchell Canyon Entrance*	\$6.00
Macedo Ranch Entrance*	\$6.00
North and South Gate Entrances*	\$10.00
Golden Poppy Annual Pass	\$125.00
California Explorer Annual Pass	\$195.00
* MINUS \$1 FOR SENIORS 62+	

SITE
Stagecoach
Boundary
Buckeye
Wildcat
Barbecue Terrace

# Camping at Mount Diablo State Park



## Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps:

**JUNIPER CAMPGROUND** (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) Located approximately two miles below the summit, on Summit Road, Juniper is known for its fantastic views. Three campsites meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. **Reservations available.**

**LIVE OAK CAMPGROUND** (23 sites, elevation 1,450 ft.) Located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, off South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. **Reservations available.**

**JUNCTION CAMPGROUND** (6 sites, elevation 2,200 ft.) Located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. **Available on a first-come, first-served basis only.**

**GROUP CAMPS** are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary. Each campground is primitive with running water (subject to availability) and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. RVs are not allowed in the group camping areas. **Please check the state park website for status.**

- All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water (subject to availability) and restrooms. Showers are available at Juniper and Live Oak campgrounds at no additional charge.
- The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, but can accommodate RVs up to 20 ft. in length. No hookups and dumping stations are provided.

## Camping Procedures

Make reservations up to six months in advance using the ReserveCalifornia website at [reservecalifornia.com](http://reservecalifornia.com). To view a map of the campgrounds and for additional info, please visit [mdia.org/camping](http://mdia.org/camping).

Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

During the fire season (generally May to October) the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925-837-2525 or 925-837-0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

## General Rules

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- Eight people and two vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent's phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. **NO GROUND FIRES.**
- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 6).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.
- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate campground or picnic area.

Group Camps			
	NIGHTLY USE FEE	CAPACITY	
		CAMPERS	VEHICLES
each	\$65	20	7
y	\$65	20	7
	\$100	30	10
	\$100	30	10
e	\$165	50	17

## WHAT CAN I SEE FROM MY CAR?

See also: <https://www.mdia.org/points-of-interest>

**Summit Visitor Center** Enjoy the view from 3,849 feet, and the natural history displays in the center. Hike the Mary Bowerman Trail just below the summit. This flat 0.7 mile trail travels around the mountain, providing spectacular views when clear. The first 0.3 mile is wheelchair accessible, and there is a designated ADA parking space at the start of the trail.

**Rock City** See “Wind Caves,” Native American mortars, and find Elephant Rock. Great site for children and a family picnic. Walk to Sentinel Rock, Artist’s Point, or Live Oak Campground. Check out Fossil Ridge Trail, about 1.2 miles out and back.

**Diablo Valley Overlook** At 2,900 feet, this large parking area near Juniper Campground has spectacular views of the East Bay. Hike to the Summit: 3 miles round trip and 1,000-foot elevation gain. Start at Laurel Nook Picnic Area and take the Summit Trail.

**Picnic Areas** There are many picnic sites and tables along the road. Discover one today.

**Other Hikes** Mount Diablo has over 160 miles of trails and a hike for everyone. See <https://www.mdia.org/hiking-mount-diablo> to learn more



PHOTO: MARY BOWERMAN TRAIL

FIRE DANGER CHART						
Fire Danger Reading	Wood fire permitted in stoves and BBQ pits (designated picnic and campsites)	Use of Compressed Logs	Use of Charcoal	Use of Self-contained Stove	Cigarette Smoking <sup>1</sup>	Park Closed <sup>2</sup>
LOW	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
MEDIUM	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
HIGH	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
HIGH WITH RED FLAG	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
VERY HIGH/EXTREME	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

<sup>1</sup> THE PROHIBITION OF SMOKING UNDER HIGH FIRE DANGER INCLUDES SMOKING WITHIN A VEHICLE.  
<sup>2</sup> PARK CLOSURE APPLIES TO ALL HIKERS, VEHICLES, BICYCLISTS (MOUNTAIN AND ROAD), AND HORSEBACK RIDERS.

### Fire Danger: How Will It Affect You?

- When permitted, fires must be in stoves or provided fire pits.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Extinguish all fires prior to departure.
- Ground fires are not permitted.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Report all wildfires immediately. Call 911.

### Astronomy on Mount Diablo

The Astronomy Program is presented by Mount Diablo State Park, Mount Diablo Astronomical Society (MDAS), and Mount Diablo Observatory Association. For more details, go to Mount Diablo Astronomical Society’s website, [www.mdas.net](http://www.mdas.net), and click on Event Calendar.



### There Are 45 Bike Turnouts in The Mount Diablo State Park

**Mount Diablo is a popular cycling destination.** Bike turnouts allow cyclists to pull over to the right so that motorists can pass safely without crossing the double line. Cyclists must use bike turnouts when followed by a vehicle. Please drive safely when in the park.

## Explore Mount Diablo Online

MDIA.org, the website of the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, is your go-to resource for all things related to Mount Diablo State Park. Whether you're looking for great hikes, points of interest, or a list of seasonal wildflowers, you will find a variety of interactive online tools to help you better plan your visit and enjoy the park before, during, and after your stay. In addition to practical up-to-date information about emergency closures, camping, and visitor center hours, our newly expanded website also includes online guides to Mount Diablo's unique flora, fauna, and geology. For those looking for park souvenirs, clothing, or printed books and field guides, our online shop is quick and easy to use. And if you're interested in volunteering in the park or becoming a member of MDIA, we've got a tab for that too.

Visit MDIA.org today to learn more!

- Videos and podcasts about the park, <https://www.mdia.org/events/archiveall>
- Directions, admission fees, and park information
- Campground, picnic, and visitor center information
- Guide to popular hikes (by level of difficulty)
- Schedule of events and activities
- Guide to butterflies of Mount Diablo
- Guide to wildflowers of Mount Diablo
- Guide to birds of Mount Diablo
- Natural history webinars
- Convenient search feature
- Online store and membership information
- Learn about volunteer opportunities



facebook



Instagram

For more information about volunteering, email [volunteer@mdia.org](mailto:volunteer@mdia.org) or leave a phone message at 925-927-7222.



### Take a Multimedia Tour

Audible Mount Diablo provides an audiovisual collection of the sights and sounds of Mount Diablo State Park.



### Mount Diablo Interpretive Association

Mission Statement

#### Preservation Through Education

Mount Diablo Interpretive Association is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization that assists the California Department of Parks and Recreation in maintaining and interpreting Mount Diablo State Park. MDIA is dedicated to preserving the wonders of Mount Diablo State Park through interpretation, education, and outreach to all communities.

[More About Us](#)

#### Get Involved

MDIA is always looking for dedicated volunteers to lead or help with various programs, outreach, and operations.

#### Shop

Check out our clothing, books, maps, and more. Every purchase supports MDIA's programs and activities.

#### Subscribe

Sign up for MDIA's e-newsletter for updates about park events and opportunities to get involved.

#### Donate

Make a difference and donate to MDIA. Your gift can support the Education Center in Mitchell Canyon or MDIA operations.

## Become an MDIA Member Today and Save 10%!

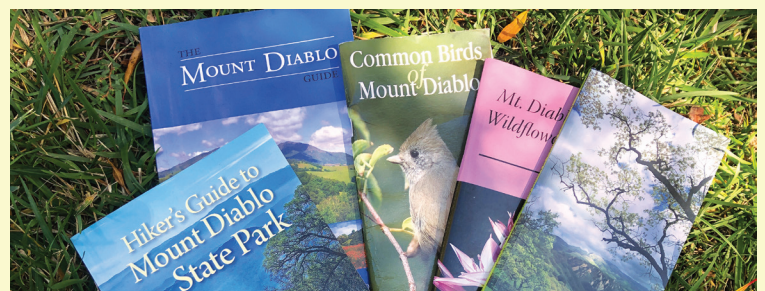


Use your smart phone to join now or shop online.

<https://mount-diablo-interpretive-association.square.site/>

#### PRODUCTS:

- Maps
- Nature Guides
- Hiking and History Guides
- Clothing
- Bicycle Jerseys



# Park Rules

You are responsible for obeying these and other Park rules

- **All Features of the Park Are Protected!** Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
- **Park Hours:** Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at sunset. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out at sunset to avoid being locked in.
- **No Alcohol:** All alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- **Vehicles/Bicycles Speed Limit:** 15 to 25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
- **Bicycles** are allowed only on paved roads, fire roads, and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.
- **Drones or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)** are prohibited.
- **Skateboards**, rollerblades, rollerskates, and gravity-propelled devices are prohibited.
- **Dogs:** Must be on leash at all times when out of your car; must be in tent or a vehicle at night; and must stay in developed areas—they are not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- **Fires:** Restrictions in effect during season. Check with a Ranger. Fires must be in fire pits or barbecues provided—no ground fires.
- **Emergencies:** Dial 911.
- **Fireworks** are prohibited.
- **Firearms**/airguns and hunting are prohibited.

## Rules of the Road for Motorists and Cyclists



Share the roadway with all Park users.

- Drive at or below the posted Park speed limits. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 22350\*
- Pass with sufficient visual clearance CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21751 \*
- Do not pass on blind curves. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21752(A)\*
- Give bicyclists 3 feet clearance. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21760(b)\*
- Yield to equestrians. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21759\*

\*MINIMUM FINE: \$238

### Mount Diablo State Park Phone Numbers

General information.....	925-837-2525
Summit Museum .....	925-837-6119
Junction Ranger .....	925-837-6129
TTY Relay Service.....	711

MAILING ADDRESS:  
(NOT FOR VEHICLE ACCESS)

**Mount Diablo State Park**  
96 Mitchell Canyon Road  
Clayton, CA 94517-1500



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the Contra Solano Sector Office, 925-673-2891. This newsletter is available in alternate formats by contacting 925-673-2891.

### Understanding Trail Signs



**TRAIL SIGNS IN THE PARK FOLLOW** California State Parks' uniform format. The name of the trail you are on is specified in relatively small horizontal type near the top of the sign. The name that appears vertically in large type (another trail but sometimes a destination or park boundary) identifies the termination of that particular trail; note the word "TO" in small letters. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.