

## Children and the Healing Power of Nature

by Michele Beasley, Executive Director

*“The students had hours where they could just be kids, getting dirty, climbing on trees and learning to skip rocks.”*

— Lindsay B. at St. James Community Foundation

Last year, the San Mateo County Parks Foundation connected more than 600 children and 75 chaperones to the parks through our field trip program. For many of these kids, it was their first time standing in a redwood grove or seeing a banana slug.

During any one of these trips, the children will look around in awe. Some giggle when they learn about ‘scat’. Others marvel that a bay leaf acts like bug repellent. And someone points to a red-tailed hawk. **Just one visit may be the spark that captures their imagination.**

Now, think back to how and where you used to play as a child. Do you have memories of playing hide and seek, climbing trees and exploring creeks? What is your earliest memory of an animal and why is it memorable? During the summer, perhaps you left the house after breakfast and did not return until it was time for dinner.

It’s not quite the same for children today. The average American child spends between 5-8 hours per day looking at a digital screen, and the average age a child receives their first phone is ten.

Kids today barely stand a chance as they are bombarded with social media, apps and video games like never before. **Going online is addictive** and it is



*Kids from Pescadero Elementary School check out a banana slug.*

affecting emotional development, leading to anxiety as opposed to stimulating self-confidence. Time in nature is being replaced with digital screen-time and psychologists are learning just how terrible this can be for young brains.

Some children face even bigger obstacles when it comes to getting enough time in nature. There may be no parks near their home or school and no way of getting to the parks further away. Land-wise, San Mateo County is one of the smallest counties in California. However, if you live in North Fair Oaks and lack

adequate transportation, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve may as well be in Florida.

### Richard Louv and Nature Deficit-Disorder

In 2005, Richard Louv introduced the world to the concept, ‘nature-deficit disorder’, through his book, *Last Child in the Woods*. It describes the human costs of being estranged from nature. These costs include diminished use of the senses, difficulty staying focused, child and adult

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## San Mateo County Parks

Coyote Point Recreation Area  
Crystal Springs Trails  
San Andreas Trail  
Sawyer Camp Trail  
Edgewood Park & Preserve  
Devil's Slide Trail  
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve  
Pillar Point Bluff  
Flood Park  
Friendship Park  
Junipero Serra Park  
Huddart Park  
Memorial Park  
Pescadero Creek Park  
Sam McDonald Park  
Heritage Grove  
Mirada Surf  
Moss Beach Park  
Quarry Park  
San Bruno Mountain Park  
Sanchez Adobe  
San Pedro Valley Park  
Tunitas Creek Beach Park  
Woodside Store  
Wunderlich Park

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*A docent from Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve talks about sea life with kids from the Boys and Girls Club of North San Mateo County.*

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obesity, Vitamin D deficiency and much more.

In addition to these mental and physical costs, Louv has been sounding the alarm about the consequences to our environment if kids are not being raised to have a close relationship with nature.

If so much of a child's day is taken up with screen-time, when do they get to play outside and get their hands muddy? If a child lives far from a park, how can they experience nature and reap its rewards? If children grow up without a real connection to nature, what will they pass on to their children? **As Louv once asked, "If nature experiences escape younger generations, who will be the future stewards of the earth?"**

Raising children to have a love for nature is important for their health, for our communities and ultimately for the planet. The beauty of getting kids out in nature is that you are reaching them as they are forming their ideas about the world and what is of value to them. Making them feel welcome and engaging their curiosity can turn them into lifelong supporters. They in turn may bring along their parents.

## Removing Barriers

A lack of transportation to the parks is a significant barrier and one that tends to affect lower-income households at a disproportionate rate. And it is clear that if tomorrow's leaders are to continue a legacy of protecting and stewarding parks and open space, then we must introduce them to the parks today.

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation covers the cost of bus transportation to the parks for schools and youth groups that cannot otherwise afford it. In doing so, we connect them to programs in the parks run by Friends' Groups or park rangers.

One such field trip was for a mothers' group out of North Fair Oaks. They and their toddlers, in partnership with Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center and Community Alliance to Revitalize Our Neighborhood (CARON), visited Edgewood Park. Volunteers from Friends of Edgewood orchestrated a Spanish-language welcome, puppet show and nature walk.

One mom shared beaming, "We had the experience of knowing the mice houses. There are so many and those houses have different rooms — it was a beautiful experience."

**Just one visit can be the spark.**

## The Reports Are In

Last June, the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England published their findings on whether time in nature leads to better health. They did this after surveying over 140 studies that involved nearly 300 million people from 20 countries.

They found that time in nature is associated with significant health benefits such as reducing one's risk for type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease as well as reducing one's blood pressure, heart rate and stress levels. The benefits to kids are enormous, from improved concentration to better motor coordination to stronger bones.

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# Ohlone-Portolá Trail Project to Mark History

By Korrine Skinner, Board Chair

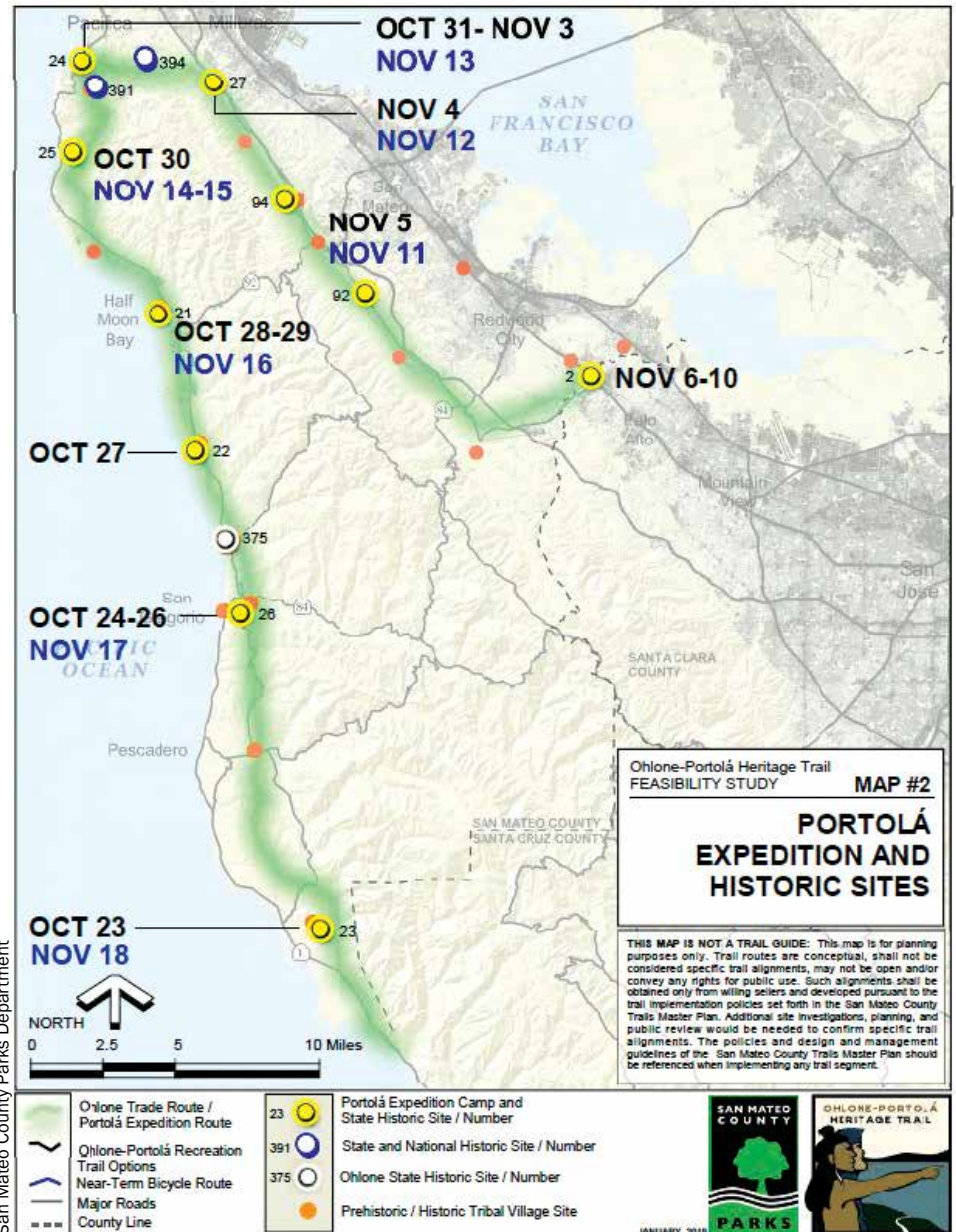
Two hundred and fifty years ago, an expedition led by Gaspar de Portolá, traveled 1,200 miles up the Alta California coast, under orders to explore an overland route for establishing Spanish harbors at San Diego and Monterey Bay.

That expedition traveled farther north, following the well-established footpaths that marked trade routes between native villages, to become the first Europeans to see the San Francisco Bay. The Parks Foundation is supporting efforts to commemorate this history and honor the region's native culture with an interpretive, multi-use recreational trail and automobile route.

Under the directions of the San Mateo County Parks department, The Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail Feasibility Study is nearing completion. The planned 90-mile regional trail will follow the Portolá Expedition's route between Native American villages and become the first trail to fully link the bayside and coast. Interpretive signage will tell the story of the indigenous Ohlone culture, as well as the expedition's 27 days in San Mateo County in 1769.

The expedition was chronicled by Portolá himself, Father Juan Crespi and Miguel Constansó, the party's engineer. According to those surviving journals, the expedition did not recognize Monterey Bay from Spanish sea-explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno's 167-year-old description and continued north in search of a suitable harbor.

As the expedition entered what is now San Mateo County near Año Nuevo State Park, they were welcomed by the Quiroste people, who inhabited one of the largest villages along the coast. Historians estimate that indigenous peoples have lived in this area for approximately 10,000 years. These natives, collectively called the Ramaytush Ohlone due to their shared dialect, numbered more than 2,000 throughout the county in 1769. California's rich resources supported the highest concentration of Native Americans west of the Mississippi River—an estimated 300,000 in comparison to



The proposed Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail route links historic tribal village sites, Portolá expedition campsites and other state and national historic sites.

the roughly 250,000 spread across all of the other western states combined. Local tribes were generally organized in territories bounded by watersheds, with small groups living in multiple villages, spaced about 3-5 miles apart along the creeks and valleys. While these 10 tribes were separate entities, descendants now refer to themselves as Ohlone.

The Quiroste provided much-needed nourishment to Portolá's men, reviving scurvy-ridden soldiers, and told of two large bodies of water about 3-days walk north. They sent guides to lead the party to neighboring villages at San Gregorio, Tunitas Creek and Half Moon Bay. At Montara Mountain, Costansó recognized

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Diana Yen Shu  
Gladys Smith  
Georgia Stigall  
Matthew Suarez  
Margaret Victoria Tides  
Donna Vaillancourt  
Gerardo Velez  
Lori Wallace  
Michael James Wilkison  
Han Yun

### Gifts in Honor

L'vannah Abrams in honor of Barry and Zenia Bielsker  
Brian and Leslie Baker in honor of Joseph Pfeister  
Alvin and Marsha Begun in honor of Park Rangers and Volunteers  
Deborah Bruskin in honor of John and Frances Morse  
Mary Burns in honor of Julia Bott  
Megan Fluke in honor of Michele Beasley  
Rebecca Haseleu and Paul Hackleman in honor of Ranger Laurel Finnegan  
Linda Leong in honor of Julia Bott

Melinda Owens in honor of Emily Anderson  
Paul Resnick and Joan Karlin in honor of Elizabeth Coonan, Deborah Gould and Laurie Palmer, Elizabeth Gould  
Kenneth Schwartz and Jane Tan in honor of Ranger Rob Cala

### Gifts in Memory

Timothy Burkhart in memory of Hannah Burkhart  
Jose Delgado and Joanna Nguyen-Delgado in memory of Jonathan Le  
Sam Herzberg in memory of Harlan Edelman  
Sam Herzberg in memory of Maria Solis  
Joan Lane in memory of Melvin B. Lane  
Anita Lusebrink in memory of Karen Lusebrink  
Michael Pacelli in memory of Charles Derwin  
TOSA Foundation in memory of Christy Holloway  
Scott Van Tyle in memory of Louis and Genie Van Tyle

### Matching Gift Programs

AmazonSmile Foundation  
Apple Matching Gifts Program  
Gilead Sciences, Inc.  
Google Donations for Doers  
Google Matching Gifts Program  
Intel Foundation  
Johnson & Johnson  
Jump Associates LLC  
Microsoft Matching Gifts Program  
Thermo Fisher Scientific  
Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign

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*Every effort was made to ensure that this list is complete and accurate. The Foundation regrets any errors or omissions. Please contact us so we may make the proper correction.*

*Newsletter design by Shannon Corey*

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*Accounting services provided by SingerLewak, LLP*

(Continued from page 2)

In Japan, ‘forest-bathing’, or shinrin-yoku, has been in practice since the 1980s where it is a cornerstone of preventive health care and healing in Japanese medicine. People derive many health benefits from simply being under the forest canopy.

The Nordic countries are well-known for having children spend up to half the school day outdoors (hail or shine) understanding the real-world application of their classroom studies. And now doctors in Scotland are actually prescribing nature to their patients.

Consider this fact: In 2016, the United States spent \$10,348 per person on healthcare while the median per-person spending on urban parks was \$83<sup>1</sup>. Parks have been left out of the health equation even though so much data points to their benefits. Physical inactivity contributes to many chronic diseases, so it literally kills people. A walk in the park on a weekly basis may be just what the doctor ordered.

And they are starting to do it right here. Pediatricians with the San Mateo County Health System are giving out park prescriptions that recommend spending one hour in nature, twice a week.

“We want to promote the use and enjoyment of parks and public lands to benefit our patient’s physical and mental

1. Active Parks, Healthy Cities- City Parks Alliance



The San Mateo County Parks Foundation pays for the bus transportation that connects kids to the parks.

health,” says Dr. Rachel Borovina with the Healthy Lifestyle Clinic. “The smiles, laughter, and visible decrease in stress for both the patients and parents should be enough to confirm that time spent in nature is important to our health.”

**“The smiles, laughter and visible decrease in stress for both the patients and parents should be enough to confirm that time spent in nature is important to our health.”**

—Dr. Rachel Borovina,

We got to witness this in action when Dr. Borovina brought several families who are patients at the Health System

for a “Walk with a Doc” at Wunderlich Park. Docents from Friends of Huddart and Wunderlich Parks were on hand to take small groups on a 30-minute walk in nature. To witness the kids’ and their parents’ faces light up at the height of trees or sight of a horse is magic.

These parks are our shared legacy and the more people who fall in love with them, the better off we all are. This is why the San Mateo County Parks Foundation is committed to promoting an inclusive environment in our wonderful park system so all may benefit from the healing powers of nature.

For more information on our field trip program and to get ideas about how to spend time with children outdoors, please visit [www.SupportParks.org](http://www.SupportParks.org).

(Continued from page 3)

the farallones to the west, a known landmark even in those times, and knew they’d passed Monterey Bay. Atop the mountain, they met a group of about 25 Aramai from the village of Pruristac, in Pacifica where the Sanchez Adobe now stands.

As the party camped nearby in San Pedro Valley, a small group went up the hills to hunt deer. They came back after nightfall describing a giant estuary surrounded by smokes from the fires of native villages. These hunters became the first recorded Europeans to see what we now call San Francisco Bay, most likely atop the coastal ridge now known as Sweeney Ridge.

November 4, 2019 will mark the 250th anniversary of this historic encounter. While the full trail will take time to

complete, about half of the anticipated route aligns with existing trails along the California Coastal Trail or on public lands maintained by County Parks, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, State Parks and the Golden Gate Recreation Area. The county has funded a documentary film that will begin playing this fall at the new interpretive center being built at Sanchez Adobe.

Stay tuned for other local commemorative events and follow the progress of the Ohlone-Portolá Trail Project on the County Parks web page: <https://parks.smcgov.org/ohlone-portola-heritage-trail-project>. You can support the Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail and other San Mateo County Parks Foundation projects with your donation at <http://supportparks.org/donate>.



San Mateo County Parks Department

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation provided funding for development of the Ohlone-Portolá Heritage Trail logo, which will be used on interpretive and wayfinding signage.



## San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Foundation

1701 Coyote Point Drive  
San Mateo, CA 94401

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Thanks to thousands of individual donors like you, the Foundation has provided millions of dollars to support our San Mateo County Parks.

### **Every gift counts – join us today!**

You can support the Foundation and our parks by making your donation today. Your gift will help us fund priority programs and projects that benefit park visitors and the parks' natural resources.

Gifts can be mailed to  
San Mateo County  
Parks Foundation  
1701 Coyote Point Drive,  
San Mateo, CA 94401

Or online at [www.SupportParks.org](http://www.SupportParks.org)

### **Leave a Legacy Gift to the San Mateo County Parks Foundation**

Your generous contributions have helped us fund over 30 projects, and a gift from your estate could continue that legacy by providing important future support for the San Mateo County Parks.

Gifts large and small are important.

Charitable giving is not only for the wealthy! Estate gifts can be unrestricted or dedicated to specific projects or parks that are dear to you.

For more information, please contact Michele Beasley, Executive Director, at [Michele@SupportParks.org](mailto:Michele@SupportParks.org) or (650) 321-5812.

### **Our commitment**

**The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is committed to providing funding to improve the quality of County Parks for our community.**

**To get this newsletter by email,  
send an email to [Michele@supportparks.org](mailto:Michele@supportparks.org)**