

San Mateo County Parks Foundation

inspiring people to care for, learn about and enjoy our parks

FALL 2024

Your Gifts at Work

As the San Mateo County Parks Foundation prepares to make a gift to County Parks, we'd like to share with you, our generous supporters, how your donations are making a difference.

The Man behind Sam McDonald Park

First up, it is time to give Sam McDonald the recognition he deserves. The nomination of Sam McDonald Park to the National Register of Historic Places would recognize Sam McDonald for his philanthropy and gift of property to Stanford before it became a county park. Thank you to Stanford University and POST for their generous contributions toward this project. We are especially grateful to the individual donors who closed the funding gap. All \$40,000 needed to work with a historian on this effort has been raised thanks to you, our generous donors!

Emanuel B. McDonald (Sam) was born the son of former slaves in Monroe, Louisiana in 1884. Sam's father was a Methodist minister who decided to move his family to Southern California to try their hand at sugar beet farming. From there, they moved north to Gilroy and a few years later to Washington State. As the family crossed into Oregon though, the pull of California was too much for Sam and he informed his family that he wanted to stay.

Sam made his way back to the Santa Clara Valley

and eventually found work at Stanford University hauling gravel from San Francisquito Creek to maintain campus roads. He then was hired as a night watchman to keep an eye on student drinking (and still became one of the most popular people on campus). In 1908, Sam took the job that would be his until he retired — Superintendent of Athletic Buildings and Grounds. As the first black administrator at a major university, Sam was known for his unique field maintenance techniques, including his crisscross mowing pattern that still graces football fields today.

Sam acquired land near La Honda in 1917 and built himself a modest retreat. He respected the serenity of the forest and took every opportunity to head there to reflect and pray. For many years, this tall African-American man was the only person of color to own property in the redwoods. He would cruise through La Honda in his Ford Model A and was one of the town's best-liked personalities. He created a reserve on his property, which prevented the cutting of trees or the disturbance of animals.

Sam was very generous, offering his cabin to honeymooning Stanford students and Sierra Club hiking groups. His barbeques became the stuff of legend and he would often host big feeds to support students at their athletic events.

Sam was a regular on the



Sam McDonald. Photo courtesy Special Collections & University Archives, Stanford Libraries

children's ward at Stanford Convalescent Hospital — especially during the holidays. When evergreen trees were scarce during World War II, Sam walked his property in the redwoods to find the perfect Christmas tree for the kids to decorate.

Starting in 1920 and held every May was 'Sam McDonald Day' at the Convalescent Hospital. Stanford students volunteered to paint, garden and visit with the children. The day would

close out with a big barbecue fundraiser with Sam as chef.

Former President and Stanford graduate Herbert Hoover and his wife became friends with Sam — the First Lady sought his advice on gardening. Stanford President Ray Lyman Wilbur dedicated a new thoroughfare on campus as Sam McDonald Road. When Sam retired from Stanford University in 1954 after

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San Mateo County Parks

Cowell – Purisima Trail
Coyote Point Recreation Area
Crystal Springs Regional Trail
San Andreas Segment
Sawyer Camp Segment
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
Woodside Store
Wunderlich Park

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50 years, he broke the record for length of service.

Sam died in 1957 a few weeks before the Big Game, which he had not missed in fifty years. At half-time, the Stanford Band grouped into the letters S — A — M and played the Stanford hymn in his honor. His property in the redwoods had grown to 430 acres and he bequeathed it to the Stanford Convalescent Hospital. The hospital decided to sell the land to San Mateo County to be used as a park.

Sam McDonald Park is now 850 acres. Its youth group campsites honor Sam's legacy of caring for children. The park is a magical mix of lush redwood forest, open ridges and grassy knolls. The Parks Foundation feels much gratitude for Sam and for his protecting and donating this special place. More people should know his story. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places is one way to do that.

A Blooming Partnership with Grassroots Ecology

Last fall, the Parks Foundation participated in a walking tour of Huddart and Wunderlich parks to learn more about wildfire fuel treatments. A lot of good work is happening, but reducing fire fuel throughout the parks is a massive undertaking. French broom in particular is a growing problem at Huddart Park. To aid our habitat restoration and fire-fuel reduction efforts, the Parks Foundation reached out to Grassroots Ecology about expanding their work into Huddart Park.

Since 2015, Grassroots Ecology has engaged local volunteers, especially youth, in bringing back native upland habitat to Cooley Landing in East Palo Alto. A former dumpsite with stunning bay views, Cooley Landing is surrounded by tidal salt marsh that is home to several hun-



Volunteers with Grassroots Ecology clear broom near Richards Rd trail at Huddart Park

dred species of shore birds, fish, and mammals. Thanks to Grassroots Ecology, it has become a wonderful bayside location at which to volunteer and learn about sea level rise.

The Parks Foundation was curious if Grassroots Ecology could bring some of that same energy to Huddart Park. Testing out a pilot project, two spring workdays were scheduled for volunteers to remove broom, including one with Menlo School students. The volunteers focused their attention along the trails around the East and West Meadow picnic areas. They demonstrated exceptional teamwork when removing the fruiting broom plants located near a small stream. Their primary focus was on eliminating mature plants to prevent seed persistence, but they also removed young broom and Italian thistle near Richards Road trail. Huddart Park is a great place for young volunteers to learn about redwood trees, climate-resilient forests and the use of prescribed fires by indigenous peoples.

Connecting children and

teens to meaningful volunteer opportunities in the parks gets them outside, developing skills and thinking more about their role in the natural world. It is very healing and rewarding, and it is an investment in the future. We look forward to continuing this partnership with Grassroots Ecology next spring.

Park Passes in Libraries

"We can't keep them on the shelves. Currently, there are 104 holds placed on this item."
— *Burlingame Public Library*

We had no idea the park passes would be this popular — they are in constant demand. Librarians are proud to offer them and publicize the wonderful County Parks to their patrons. When a pass is returned at the San Bruno Public Library, for example, it spends about half a day on the shelf before it goes out again. Most of the time they are in circulation.

The Parks Foundation kicked off the start of our fiscal year (July 1) with an additional gift to the libraries. Each city, county and

community college library in San Mateo County received four annual park passes. While out tabling, community members have told us how much they love the park pass program. People are putting their library cards to good use by checking the passes out. It's a little nudge to go out and discover a new park.

The parks that charge a \$6 parking fee are Coyote Point, Huddart Park, Junipero Serra Park, Memorial Park, Sam McDonald Park, San Bruno Mountain and San Pedro Valley. With a parks' pass, there is no parking fee.

We received the following comment from a College of San Mateo student:

"The passes have made me get outdoors in the county much more than I ever did without them! They're a great asset to have on-hand for students who may be low-income, or anyone who wants to enjoy our County parks. I have so many parks I want to visit, and so much excitement to go out now that I know I have the support."

You, our supportive parks community, are making this happen, and more.

Park Ranger Projects

Grey Whale Display at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

In April 2021, a dead grey whale washed ashore at Seal Cove. Park rangers worked with The Marine Mammal Center and California Academy of Sciences researchers to collect data and learn what may have caused its death. Although the findings were inconclusive, the group did determine that the whale was a female, about 40 feet long and 4 to 5 years old.

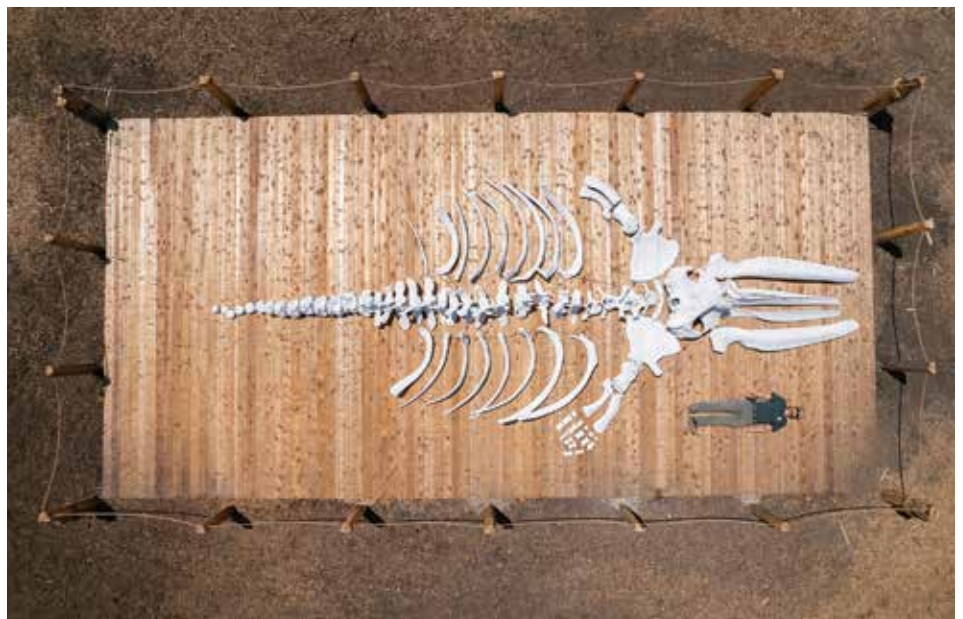
Park Ranger Rob Cala had the idea to collect the bones as the whale decomposed naturally in the intertidal zone — a process that took several weeks. "One of the most exciting finds was the skull and mandibles which I found half buried in sand," wrote Cala for the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve's newsletter *Between the Tides*. The bones dried for almost a year, after which remaining cartilage on the vertebrae was scraped clean. The bones were then painted with an exterior latex color called (what else?) whalebone.

Then the fun part: putting the bone puzzle pieces together. Today, the skeleton is laid out on a raised platform at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. As Cala shared, "The display has already provoked many conversations on stewardship, threats to whales including ship strikes and errant nets, while inspiring awareness of the largest mammals in the ocean."

Thank you to Sares Regis Community Foundation for their generous grant that helped complete this project.



May 1, 2021, park rangers successfully get the whale skull up off the beach.



Drone view of grey whale skeleton. Photo by Rob Cala

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Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Inspires and Motivates the Next Generation

The San Mateo County Parks Foundation is grateful to the California Coastal Commission for their generous WHALE TAIL® grant and for the grant deadline extension. This allowed us to serve more people after winter storms wreaked havoc on our field trip schedule.

Our goal was to improve access for all people at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. The Foundation worked with San Mateo County Parks and the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve to enhance interpretive resources for visitors.

Through this grant, 18 Title 1 schools and community-based organizations received a mix of bus transportation and Spanish translation support. The WHALE TAIL® grant also allowed us to translate the Pillar Point Bluff and Fitzgerald Marine Reserve self-guided tour brochures into Spanish and Chinese, as well as add Spanish subtitles to the FMR welcome video, which plays on a loop at the Reserve's visitor center.

Critical to the overall success of this program was the Parks Foundation's first Program Coordinator, Adriana Fernandez Arriaga. While Adriana was on our team, our program offerings and community partnerships grew exponentially. Adriana left the Foundation in July to become Public Policy Manager for El Concilio of San Mateo County and we wish her nothing but success and happiness in her new role. The Foundation looks forward to filling the Program Coordinator position and building on the strong foundation started by Adriana.



Adriana at FMR with guests from North Fair Oaks Library.

For many, this was their first time at the Reserve and they would not have been able to visit if it were not for the transportation support that their school received. For others, they were able to engage and ask questions thanks to the translation support service that was offered. The Parks Foundation remains steadfast in our desire to break down barriers to the parks and marine science education because it is clear outings like these leave a positive impression on young and old alike for years to come.



“Learning about the whale and being able to look at real-life pictures was one of our favorite parts of the field trip.”
 — anonymous teacher survey response

“We wanted our students to learn how to be good, ocean stewards.”
 — anonymous teacher survey response

"I wanted them to become familiar with this unique ecosystem and consider plant and animal adaptations. I also wanted them to think about human impact on this area and oceans in general."

— anonymous teacher survey response



"We went to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and had such a great time... We had been studying the intertidal zone... It was a great experience for them to see it in person... I asked my students what was their favorite part about the trip and seeing sea stars was their number one answer."

— Chris S., 5th grade Teacher, Buri Buri Elementary School



"My students LOVED being out in nature, hiking in the forest, and walking along the beach, and the most popular part was exploring the tide pools and learning from our Park Ranger and docents. It was magical to see their excitement and interest."

— anonymous teacher survey response



"It's so great to know that you [Adriana] are here to help provide Spanish translation. I have not heard of a service like this in outdoor spaces and I believe more services like these need to exist. Also, thank you for the transportation."

—Latino Parent Chaperone, Alvarado Elementary School, San Francisco

"I enjoyed the trip and I had a fun time exploring the park. I'm going to be majoring in marine biology and this was a way for me to experience it firsthand...I saw that I enjoyed how the ocean and its life functions. I want to make a difference in the world and I want to see if I can do that by doing something that I love — marine-related things — so this field trip inspired me to do the best I can in my major."

—Emma, Woodside High School student

Thank you to our generous supporters!

The following contributed between April 1, 2024 and August 10, 2024

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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.

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Above: Park rangers get the job done. Below: Completed project



Service Road Bridge at Huddart Park

This past spring, park rangers reached out to the Foundation with a bridge repair project. Located near Greer Road in Huddart Park, the service road bridge was showing damage to the decking, and some of the main floor beams needed replacement. Woodside Fire uses this entrance into the park, but they did not want to drive their fire truck across the bridge until it was fixed. This repair project was completed in May.

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Crocker Gate Improvement at San Bruno Mountain

This quick and easy access improvement project happened late last year. Right away, it made a difference in people's lives. As shared by Supervising Park Ranger Priscilla Alvarez, "A lady thanked us because she was using the main entrance when she would come with her daughter who is in a wheelchair. She was so happy she can now bring her in through Crocker (Avenue) — thank you to the Foundation for funding this great project."



Before and after pictures of the Crocker Avenue gate entrance to San Bruno Mountain

Supporting Creative Endeavors

Park Pics

Every 15 months, we hold a photo contest to capture and celebrate the parks in a particular season. This year we held it over winter 2024 and awarded prizes in three categories: Landscapes and Waterscapes, Up Close with Nature and People in Parks. Parks Pics returns spring 2025.

All the winning entries can be found on our website:

Morning Walk, by James Hunter, winner of Landscapes and Waterscapes

Snowy Egret Thrashes the Worm it just Caught, by Herb Hwang, winner of Up Close with Nature

A Tie!

Mother to Son — Passing down a Love for the Outdoors, by Srikanth Cherukuri, winner of People in Parks

Sunkissed, by Jeff Regan, winner of People in Parks

Park Posters

Applications closed in August for the second round of our San Mateo County Park Posters Project. Our jury recently reviewed 26 applications to create artwork for San Pedro Valley, Sawyer Camp Trail, and Wunderlich Park. Once selected, our artists will get to work, and we hope to unveil new designs later this winter.

Our first round of posters featuring Memorial Park, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, and Edgewood Preserve are for sale at our online store. They make a great gift for the park-lover in your life!

You can make a donation today in support of habitat restoration, fire-fuel reduction, passes in libraries, park posters and more. It is appreciated!



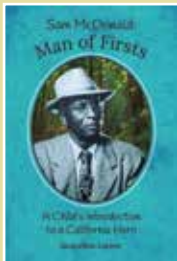
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BUY PARK POSTERS

Arriving Online Now!

Sam McDonald: Man of Firsts, A Child's Introduction to a California Hero
by Jacqueline Larsen



Jacqueline Larsen is a senior at Menlo School and lives in Menlo Park, CA. She is a mentor, tutor and program director working with underserved and at-risk children. She helped with early research on the nomination of Sam McDonald Park and her enthusiasm led her to write a children's book about Sam.



Snowy Egret Thrashes the Worm it just Caught, by Herb Hwang, winner of Up Close with Nature. To see our other winners including our tie in the People in Park category, please visit www.supportparks.org/2024-park-pics-winners