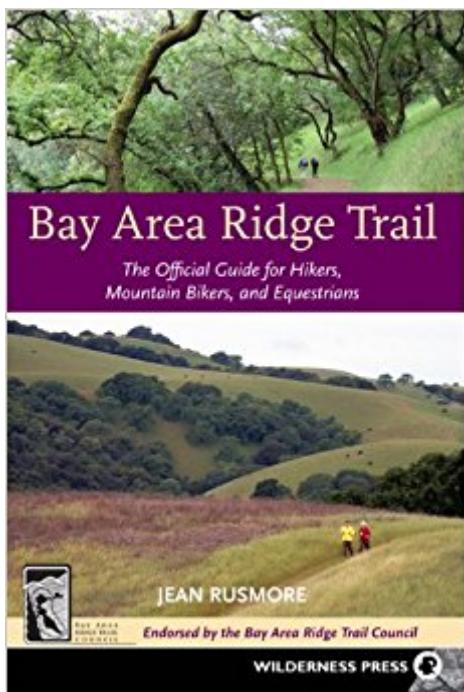


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Bay Area Ridge Trail: The Official Guide For Hikers, Mountain Bikers And Equestrians



Synopsis

The official guide to the ever-growing Bay Area Ridge Trail, a proposed 400-mile route that circles the ridgeline of the San Francisco Bay, crossing over nine counties. Five new trails and 13 more miles await discovery in this new edition, bringing the mileage of the completed Ridge Trail to 225. It also includes new or rerouted sections of at least six trails and details five trails that were only briefly mentioned in the 1st edition update.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jean Rusmore is coauthor of South Bay Trails and Peninsula Trails and has worked for Bay Area green spaces for many years. She was recently profiled as one of 50 extraordinary Bay Area elders in Legacy (UC Press, 2006).

One of the trails I used was off. But the markings on the Bay Area Trails often are non existent or wrong.

Great book! It is packed full of detail and will be very useful while planning and executing my hiking/backpacking trips.

One of the more interesting hiking developments over the last few decades has been the creation of

longer "scenic" trails. Modelled upon the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail, these new trails cover many miles (though they are generally shorter than the aforementioned routes) and offer the opportunity for extended recreation. Some of these, the Tahoe Rim Trail, for example, have turned into stellar routes worthy of a week (or longer) backpack trip. But others, most notably the Backbone Trail of the Santa Monica National Recreational Area, are essentially expensive "feel good" projects with little recreational value due to extensive regulations on camping and use. The Bay Area Ridge Trail, one of the largest of these projects, is about 60% complete. It covers some truly scenic land and when finished, it will extend almost 500 miles. This book, now in its second edition, is an excellent guide to the completed portions of the trail. But as I read it, I was unsure how the trail would ultimately turn out. Will it become a fabulous mid range distance hike, open to users from all over, or will it be merely an expensive resigning of existing routes that will only see day use, and then only over portions of the trail? Rusmore is an experienced hiker, having cut her teeth on the San Gabriel mountains in southern California before moving to the more beautiful, but less rugged, Bay Area. She has explored the area extensively for decades and her guidebooks are very detailed. Every stretch of trail described in this book that I have hiked is accurate. In addition to very detailed trail descriptions, this book includes topo maps showing both the main (hiking) route and alternative biking and equestrian routes. She also includes notes on side routes where appropriate and such camping options as are available. Some sections of the Ridge Trail can be hiked continuously, and she gives added treatment to these areas, most notably the East Bay Skyline Trail and the trail in the Marin Headlands. In all this is a very well done book and those hoping to hike the parts of the trail now open, as well as those seeking extended day hikes and a few point to point backpack trips would be well advised to buy this book. But having read the book, I worry about the future of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Three concerns come to mind. First, camping opportunities are not very abundant. This problem can effectively kill a trail as a through hike. Indeed, the Backbone Trail is effectively pointless for this very reason. Of course, it is true that people might simply seek day hike opportunities, but the Bay Area has no shortage of these (despite its relatively small size, the Bay Area is by far the largest chapter of California Hiking and has numerous hiking opportunities.) To justify a trail of this scope and expense, camping opportunities for a through hike are a must. And this leads to problem 2: to complete this trail, either some private land must be crossed or various public agencies will have to purchase, at great expense, considerable additional land in the part of the country that boasts the most pricy real estate in the nation. I think the most cost effective way to do this would be by use of eminent domain. Unfortunately, local government officials would much rather condemn private homes to build a new Walmart or sports arena than to pay property owners

for the use of a trail through their lands. As a result, eminent domain now has a pretty bad name and is being restricted by concerns citizens who (rightly) do not trust their local government to use it wisely. I have no solution for this problem (though it should be noted that some landowners, notably George Lucas, have graciously allowed trail building and public access through their property.) I do, however, think the author's claim that these problems will be solved and the trail completed by 2012 is overly optimistic. If all the relevant public agencies work together, maybe, but this leads to...

Problem 3: multiple agencies means multiple regulations which can kill through hiking opportunities. Already hikers need a special permit on East Bay Skyland lands, fees in various county and state parks, etc. This is reasonable for day hikes, but unrealistic for longer backpack trips. So in conclusion, I think the Bay Area Ridge Trail shows a lot of promise. It certainly covers a lot of nice country which this book glowingly describes. And, as the author notes, it remains a work in progress. Whether it becomes the preeminent urban-wildlands trail, or just an expensive proposition in doing "something" remains to be seen. I am cautiously optimistic that it will become more like the Tahoe Rim Trail and less like the unfortunate Backbone Trail. It could easily be more scenic than both, if the sharp black and white photos in this book are any guide. But only time will tell.

I have had occasion to hike over several sections of the "BART" trail, as I call it. Each section in the book covers a specific trail segment. As you can see in these photos, the trail is marked with a bright blue medallion, often placed on the same post as the East Bay Regional Parks marker. The photos here were taken at the Don Castro Regional Park segment, in Castro Valley. It's a pretty hike through this section. On the section through Don Castro, don't miss an interesting feature: There is a government "Gaging Station" right on the trail. It's in the section that goes under the freeway. This station measures the creek water flow, and transmits the information to a central analysis office. It's true that the most up-to-date information on these trails is available online. However, I enjoy having a hardcopy, so that I can write notes and make plans for my next hike! So all in all, I thought this was a very good book. True, some sections are outdated as the trail changes and improves, but overall, still a good guide to own. If you haven't hiked the BART trail yet--get out there and give it a try!

The problems with the trail that other reviewers mention are there. But they are things that are being worked on. I have been treated very well by the staff at the Ridge Trail Council. But. This review is about the book. I am creating GPS tracks of the trail and will end up hiking all the completed sections and probably other sections as well. And I depend on the book for directions and a general outline.

For what it is, it gets the job done well. I think that as the Ridge Trail Council gets more money and works more on their website, most of the information in the book would be better in an online format. Because things change. Especially in the Bay Area. Public transportation routes and stops change frequently. I think Ms. Rusmore has done a creditable job of telling the tale of the trail, getting people to the trailhead and giving most readers most of the information needed. There could be a better map and description of the trail as it moves through San Francisco. Maybe I can help with that. This is a big trail in a major urban area. I think it's wonderful that it goes through San Francisco and marvelous that it crosses the Golden Gate Bridge. Five long trails cross that bridge. And the Bay Area Ridge Trail crosses other bridges, as well. After all, it is the Bay Area. If you plan to hike the Ridge Trail, you will want this book. It is essential. And what better way to get exercise, see beautiful scenery, and experience the whole Bay Area? Walk well.

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