

exploring

A cool winter hike Fremont Older Open Space Preserve in Saratoga Neil Wiley

A group of young boys left a Boy Scout troop to form their own unofficial Explorer Post sixty-eight years ago. I was one of them. Instead of chasing merit badges, we just wanted to hike. We were always looking for challenges, including wandering through private property, riding railroad boxcars, hunting for snakes, and sliding down a toboggan slide without a toboggan. One such adventure took place in Dan Ryan Woods Preserve in Chicago, on a winter day with temperatures hovering around zero degrees F.

The pond looked frozen. But, as we skated across without skates, our leader broke through the ice. By the time we got him out, he was freezing. We were miles from a road. We broke into a cabin, found some firewood, and heated him enough to save his life.

As you might expect, this experience has made me cautious about winter hikes, even here in sunny California. I was looking for a good place to explore when the temperature is in the thirties and cold rain is a possibility.

Fremont Older Open Space Preserve is a good winter choice. It offers 14.7 miles of trail over 732 acres. Most of the trails are in

full sun. The uphill climbs are steep enough to keep you warm, but gentle enough to avoid heart failure. It's all worth it to see the rolling green hills so beautiful in winter. Even better, the distant views of the entire peninsula are crisp and clear with less smog.

I saw no frozen ponds, but I did walk along a shallow creek on Creekside Trail. If the weather changes, it is only a few miles back to your car and Saratoga restaurants.

Of course, nothing is perfect. I didn't experience rain or lightning, but they could be dangerous in this open environment. Also, Fremont Older has limited facilities—one primitive porta potty, no running water, and a limited parking area that barely serves 21 vehicles. When I drove in at 8:30 a.m., I saw lots of spaces, but when I returned at noon, the lot was full, and cars were parked along the nearby roads. (Two women begged me for my parking space.) Although more parking is available in the adjacent Stevens Creek County Park, it's a long walk. You'll have better luck early on a weekday.

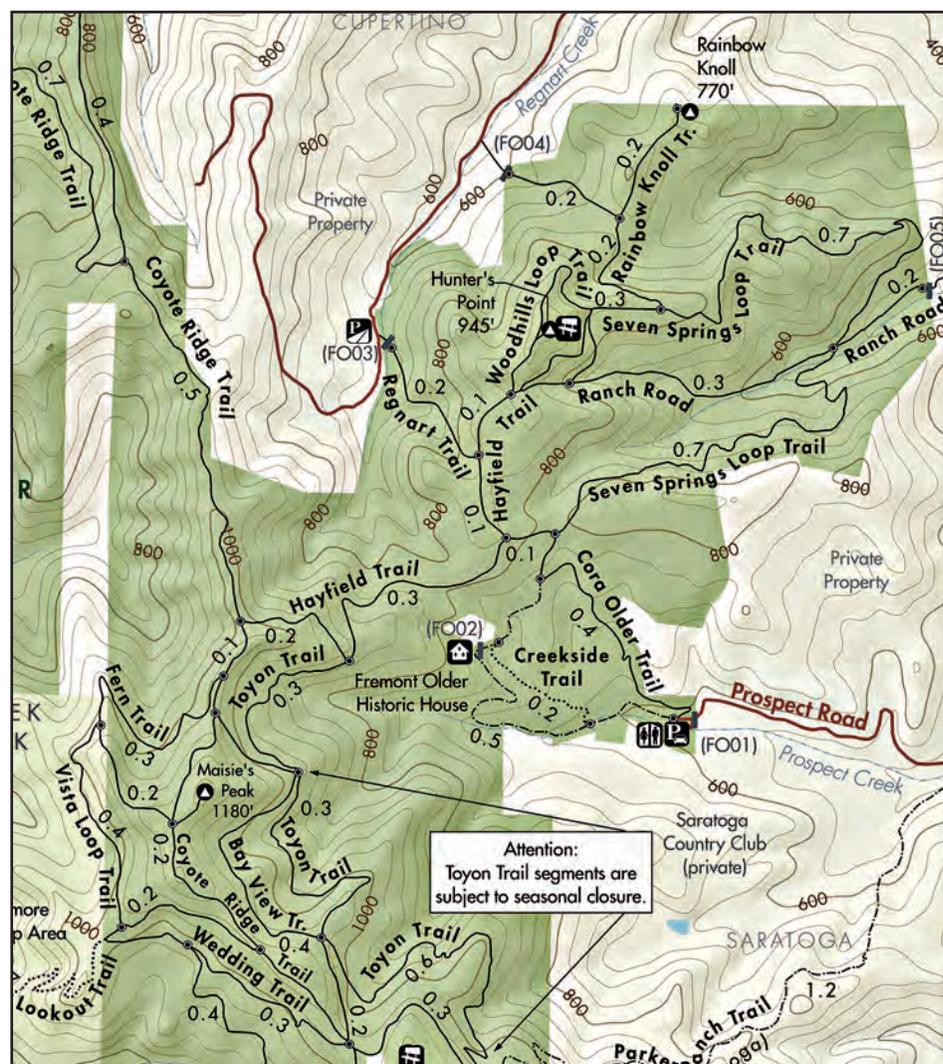
The Hunter's Point Loop offers a nice, moderate hike when you don't have time for

a day-long trip. You can hike the 3.1-mile loop in two to three hours. All the views are nice, but the prize is the summit of 945-foot Hunter's Point. Although not as high as our mountains, the hill offers a 360-degree view, displaying the entire peninsula, Mount Tamalpais, Mount Diablo, the East Bay hills, San Francisco Bay, our own Mount Umunhum/Loma Prieta range, the Saratoga foothills, and the coastal range. On a clear day it is spectacular. And even if you don't like scenery, Hunter's Point is a good place to talk with fellow hikers.

The easy-to-climb hills to Hunter's Point offer little challenge for families and leashed dogs, but my fear of cold made the climb a little difficult. It didn't help that I was wearing four layers of clothing. By the time I reached the top, I noticed that many people were wearing T-shirts and unitards.

Bikers and equestrians may find this trail too short. You can extend the hike by continuing down Hayfield Trail west to Coyote Ridge Trail and the 1180-foot Maisie's Peak.

Another popular trail is the 2.6-mile Seven





Springs Trail Loop. It has more scenic views. The elevation gain is 561 feet.

The longer Parker Ranch Trail to Nob Hill Loop is 4.2 miles out and back, with an elevation gain of 830 feet. If you want even more adventure, visit nearby Stevens Creek County Park or Picchetti Ranch Open Space Preserve.

The house built by editor Fremont Older is still standing, but is now a private residence. Public tours, when available, are scheduled by Midpeninsula Open Space.

Limitations. When conditions are too wet, the Toyon and Wedding trails are closed to bicyclists and equestrians. Dogs are welcome on leash, but leash laws are strict. For what it's worth, the *BringFido* guest rating is 4.3 out of 5 bones. Don't forget potable water and containers for you and your dog.

Directions. Parking is located off Prospect Road in Saratoga. Take Highway 17 to northbound 85, and then turn left on De Anza Boulevard. Drive about a half mile, and then turn right on Prospect Road. At the first stop sign, turn slightly left and cross the railroad tracks to remain on Prospect Road. Follow Prospect Road for 1.3 miles. Prospect makes a few turns. You'll go past the Saratoga Country Club to the preserve parking lot.

For your GPS, use the address 22898 Prospect Road, Saratoga, California 95070. For preserve information, call 650-691-1200, email info@openspace.org, or visit www.openspace.org.

I recommend bringing a paper map, compass, or a trail app for your phone. Although signage is good, curving trails and many intersections can be confusing. Bring a jacket, hat, and gloves in case of cold or rain, and water in case you get too warm.

Don't let the winter keep you inside. Get out and hike.

