



Accessibility

In compliance with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA"), the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department will not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its programs, services, or activities. The Department will make reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy our programs, services, facilities, and activities. If you need assistance with an ADA request, please contact our ADA Coordinator at: ADACoordinator@prk.sccgov.org.



Welcome

Welcome to Almaden Quicksilver County Park, spectacular in natural diversity and a landmark of California history. The park is the site of over 135 years of mining activities and former home to more than 1,800 miners and their families. The park encompasses 4,163 acres, occupying a majority of Capitancillos Ridge. During early spring, the park offers one of the most spectacular wildflower displays in the region. Remnants of the mining era also offer an exciting look into mining operations of the latter part of the 19th century.

Activities

- Casa Grande and the New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum exhibits illustrate how and why cinnabar was mined at New Almaden and offer a glimpse of life in this historic community over 150 years ago. Both are located at 21350 Almaden Road in the town of New Almaden. Museum hours vary. Please check our website or call (408) 918-7770 for the most up to date information.
- 38 miles of hiking trails, 30 miles of equestrian trails and over 16 miles of bicycle trails. In addition, all trails are available to pet owners to walk their dogs on leash.
- Picnic tables are scattered throughout the park adjacent to trails. Horse water troughs are available in a few locations. No potable water is available within the park except at the Hacienda and Mockingbird Hill entrances.
- Remnants of mining structures can be seen throughout the park. All mines and adits have been sealed. However, the San Cristobal mine may be viewed from behind a locked gate. For your safety, please do not climb on any structures. For information about guided nature and history walks, please check our website or call (408) 918-7770.

Hours and Fees

The park is open year-round from 8 a.m. until sunset. Park trails are subject to closure due to dangerous conditions, typically after heavy rains. No fees are required at any entrances.

Share the Trails

Be Considerate: Use particular caution when passing children, senior citizens, and people with dogs.

Use Open Trails Only: Trails may be closed due to sensitive environmental concerns.

Be Aware of Conditions: Riding (even on open trails) when conditions are poor, such as shortly after a rain, may cause trail damage.

Plan Ahead: Know your equipment, your ability and where you are going. Carry necessary supplies for changes in weather or other conditions.

Catch and Release Only!

Do not eat the fish! Mercury has been found to accumulate in Guadalupe and Almaden Reservoirs at levels that make the fish from those reservoirs unsafe to eat.

Almaden Quicksilver was once the site of extensive quicksilver (mercury) mining. Sediments that contain mercury have been deposited in some of the local reservoirs and streams. Over time, the mercury in the sediment may have been converted to methyl mercury by naturally occurring bacteria. Methyl mercury is absorbed by aquatic plants and fish, and subsequently by humans who may eat the contaminated fish. If you have any questions regarding mercury and its effects, please contact County Environmental Health Services at (408) 918-3400.

Location

There are three park entrances:

Hacienda: 21785 Almaden Rd, San Jose

Mockingbird Hill: South end of Mockingbird Hill Lane, San Jose

Wood Rd: Hicks Rd at Wood Rd, San Jose

Cultural History

About 10 million years ago, tectonic plate movement changed serpentine rock into silica carbonate and deposited cinnabar, the red ore of mercury. Used for extracting gold and silver, New Almaden's mercury was instrumental in the success of the California gold rush and Nevada silver boom.

Prior to this, local indigenous peoples ground the vibrant red rock for body paint and traded it. In 1845 Andres Castillero, a Mexican cavalry officer, discovered cinnabar contained mercury and made the first mining claim under the Mexican government. Castillero required money to increase mercury production and returned to Mexico for financing.

With war between the U.S. and Mexico imminent, Castillero sold his shares to the Mexican-based Barron, Forbes, & Co. who developed the "Hacienda de Beneficio," or reduction works. They named the New Almaden Mine after the world renown Almaden Mine in Spain. Workers built houses in the hills surrounding the tunnels and shafts. The first residents were Mexican, Chilean and Indigenous peoples speaking mostly Spanish-based dialects, giving the area the name Spanishtown. It was the largest settlement on the hill and included a school and Catholic church. The 1860's brought an influx of Cornish, Welsh, Swedish and Irish miners who established the settlement of Englishtown. The town included a store, community center, schoolhouse, boarding houses, and a Methodist Episcopal Church. The Hacienda, known today as New Almaden, included quaint cottages strung between the reduction works and the 1854 built Casa Grande, where the mine manager lived.

After a protracted Supreme Court battle, in 1864, ownership of 8,580 acres was sold for \$1.75 million to American-owned Quicksilver Mining Company. Due to falling demand and profits, mine operations ceased in 1912. Englishtown and Spanishtown became deserted. From 1928 to the 1970's mining operations continued under small operators, including the New Idria Mining Corporation. By 1970, the decline in the price of mercury and realization of mercury's environmental toxicity caused the mines to close. All operations ended in 1976.

Natural Diversity

Almaden Quicksilver County park is dominated by a blend of oak woodland, chaparral and grassland. This mosaic of plant communities provides breeding, shelter and foraging habitats for a wide range of wildlife. The park is home to over 500 plants, many brought in by the mining communities.

Blue oak woodland predominates with patches of interior live, coast live, valley, black, California scrub and leather oaks. Many mammals, insects, and birds such as acorn woodpeckers, rely on oaks as a source of food and shelter. Other animals, such as snakes, skunks and toads, benefit by feeding on insects reliant on the oaks.



Men in front of furnace circa 1890

Photo: County Parks Collection