



## Welcome

Welcome to Mt. Madonna County Park, one of the most majestic of Santa Clara County's regional park and recreation areas. This 3,219 acre park is dominated by the redwood forest so characteristic of the Santa Cruz Mountain range. To the east, the park overlooks the Santa Clara Valley, to the west, Monterey Bay. As the slopes of Mt. Madonna descend toward the valley, the landscape changes from redwood forest to oak woodland, dense chaparral, and grassy meadows. Park visitors may learn about regional natural history, and will understand why cattle baron Henry Miller spent his summers here. Enjoy your visit, and return often to the pristine redwood forest of Mt. Madonna County Park.

## How to Get There

Mt. Madonna County Park is located at:  
7850 Pole Line Rd Watsonville, CA 95076



The park is located off of Highway 152 (Hecker Pass Highway), 10 miles west of Gilroy. From the east, use Highway 101 and take the Highway 152 West exit. From the west, use Highway 1 and take the Highway 152 East exit. The entrance to the park is located at the summit of Highway 152 at Pole Line Road.

## Hours and Fees

The park is open year-round from 8 a.m. until sunset. All non-campers must leave the park by sunset.

Vehicle entry fees are collected year-round. Fees are required for camping and for use of group picnic areas. Fees are posted at the kiosk.

## 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: ADACoordinator@prk.sccgov.org.

## Natural History

Mt. Madonna County Park is situated at the top of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The various microclimates and habitats within the park are influenced by the cool marine air coming from the Monterey Bay to the west, and warm dry air from the valley to the east.

Much of the landscape of Mt. Madonna Park is characterized by coast redwood forest. Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) is one of the tallest and oldest tree species in the world, and can grow to nearly 300 feet in height and live for over 2,000 years. The redwoods grow in a twenty-mile wide band from southwestern Oregon to the Santa Cruz Mountains, and continue along the Pacific fog belt down to Big Sur. In the early morning, the heavy fog may give the appearance of an overnight rain shower.

Among the coast redwood is the madrone tree, which often assumes a contorted shape due to its constant search for light. Each summer, the thin outer bark peels back and hangs from the tree, exposing smooth light green bark which eventually weathers to a rich orange-brown. At one time, charcoal from the madrone was used as an ingredient for gunpowder!

Several varieties of oak also live on Mt. Madonna, including coast live oak, canyon live oak and valley oak. Another species, tanoak, shares characteristics of the oaks but is technically not an oak. The 'tan' part of the name is due to the fact that the tannins drawn from its bark were used to tan leather.

The park is also home to many animal species. Black tailed deer can be seen grazing on native plants such as manzanita, chaparral pea, poppy or foxglove. At almost any location in the park, the visitor is likely to see the California gray squirrel. During the summer, the gray squirrel lives in a nest twenty feet above the ground, and in the winter nests inside hollow trees. Its hoarse barking call can be heard during the summer months. Occasionally, park visitors may also spot a bobcat, raccoon, coyote, fox, or banana slug.



Henry Miller vacation home built in 1901

## Cultural History

Archeological evidence suggests that the park area was used by indigenous people for thousands of years. Neighboring tribes on both sides of the Santa Cruz mountain range likely hunted, tended and harvested plants, and traded with each other. The nearby Chitactac-Adams Heritage County Park, situated at the base of Mt. Madonna along Watsonville Road, features bedrock mortars, petroglyphs and other evidence of an ancient village settlement.

During the 19th century, the lands of Mt. Madonna County Park were part of Rancho Las Animas ("the souls"), a land grant bestowed in 1802 to Jose Mariano Castro by Spanish Viceroy Felix Marquina. The Las Animas Rancho was the only rancho in California granted directly by a viceroy. The Spanish and Mexicans used the Madonna area for cattle grazing and for hunting deer, bear and small game.

A late 1800's resident of the mountain, the recluse pioneer and poet Hiram Wentworth, has been given the credit for naming this 1,897 foot peak "Madonna" after the Italian name for the Virgin Mary.

In 1859, land and cattle baron Henry Miller purchased his first parcel of the Las Animas Rancho as a place to raise cattle for his San Francisco commercial beef business. Eventually, Miller owned 13,000 acres of the rancho.

The Miller family began camping at Mt. Madonna in 1879. The family "roughed it" with brightly colored, fully furnished and carpeted tents. From the mid 1890's to 1901, Miller built four houses at Mt. Madonna. The first was a two-story redwood cabin with five or six rooms. The second and third were built for his children Nellie and Henry Jr. At the insistence of Mrs. Miller, a fourth house was built in 1901 at a cost of \$250,000. The elaborate home was a sprawling structure which included seven bedrooms and baths, a living room with a veranda on three sides, and a 3,600 square foot ballroom.



Ruins of the Henry Miller vacation home (pictured above)

After Henry Miller's death in 1916, the Madonna homes fell into disrepair. County Supervisors Henry Hecker (for whom Hecker Pass is named) and C.P. Cooley engineered the County's purchase of the first piece of Mt. Madonna County Park from the Miller heirs in 1927. Nearly 1,000 additional acres were purchased from the Miller family between 1930 and 1961.

In the 1930's a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was established at the park. The CCC built roads, trails, picnic tables and barbecue pits, the first park amenities available for use by the public.

## Share the Trails

Bicycles are prohibited on all trails within the park. For the safety and protection of all visitors, please adhere to the following trail etiquette guidelines.

- Be Considerate:** Keep speeds at a safe pace. Be courteous to other trail users and use caution when passing horses, kids, senior citizens, and people with dogs.
- Use Open Trails Only:** Trails may be subject to closure. For trail status, call 408-355-2200 ext 7.
- 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.



Yurt Camping in Valley View 1

## Camping

- Camp at established campsites.
- All campsites are available by reservation. Call **408-355-2201** or go to [www.gooutsidetheplay.org](http://www.gooutsidetheplay.org) to make a reservation up to 48 hours in advance. Less than 48 hours any remaining campsites are first come, first serve.
- Each campsite must show physical occupancy with tent / vehicle / trailer. Maximum of 8 persons and 2 vehicles per site.
- Persons under age 18 cannot camp overnight unless accompanied by a responsible adult.
- Maximum of two pets per campsite. Keep pets on a 6-foot (or less) leash during the day, and in confined areas overnight.
- No wood gathering. Wood may be purchased at the entry kiosk during business hours and when in stock.
- Quiet hours are 10:00 pm to 7:00 am. No radios, musical instruments, or other loud noises during quiet hours.
- Maximum stay from Memorial Day to Labor Day is 14 days in any County Park(s) cumulatively. The remainder of the year is 14 days in any one County Park within a 45 day period.
- No horses in campgrounds or overnight camping with horses.
- RV Camping**
- Mt. Madonna has 30 partial hook-up sites with electricity and water.
- An on-site dump station is located on Valley View Road.