

an unsigned road fork, and then promptly turn left at another unsigned trail junction.

Back Creek flows below sensational eroded rock and is framed by buckeye, blue oak, interior live oak, and gray pine for the first 0.5 mile. Cross a gate and continue past orange bush monkey-flower, fragrant sage, toyon, and yarrow. A bit farther, several spur trails break to the left amid chamise, wild grape, poison oak, and yerba santa; always stay right and resume climbing Back Canyon, which steepens at 1.3 miles. From 2.1 to 3.2 miles, chamise dominates, interspersed with yerba santa and eventually thickets of whiteleaf manzanita recovering from a major fire that ravaged this area in 1977.

Upon reaching isolated Murchio Gap (3.5 miles), you can climb another 1,500 feet in elevation to Mount Diablo Summit (Hike 87: Mount Diablo Loop). To bypass the summit, head south from Murchio Gap 0.8 mile to Deer Flat, the most abundant wildlife and birding area in the park. Bear left here and descend 1 mile to gently swirling Mitchell Creek. Promptly reach a grassy flat where canyon and coast live oaks grow magnificently tall near creekside.



*Wildflower meadow near Murchio Gap*

Follow alder- and bigleaf maple-lined Mitchell Creek for 2.4 miles, taking a fire road on the right. This trail passes through grasslands featuring Coulter and gray pines to reunite with your trailhead.

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### BRIONES REGIONAL PARK TRAILS

**Length:** 8.4-mile loop

**Hiking time:** 5 hours

**High point:** 1,483 feet

**Total elevation gain:** 1,300 feet

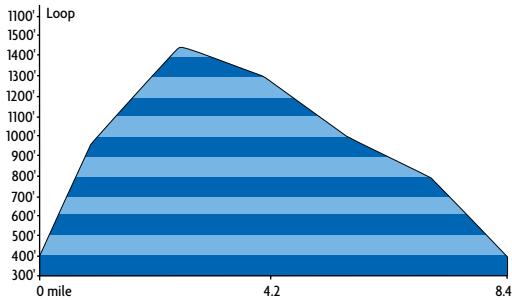
**Difficulty:** easy to moderate

**Season:** year-round

**Water:** bring your own

**Maps:** USGS 7.5' Briones Valley, USGS 7.5' Walnut Creek

**Information:** East Bay Regional Park District



Explore a creek and a pond, and then climb Briones Peak for views of rolling hillsides, Mounts Diablo and Tamalpais, and San Pablo and Suisun Bays.

From Highway 24 in Lafayette, take the Pleasant Hill Boulevard exit, go north for 0.6 mile, and then turn left on Reliez Valley Road. Drive 4.8 miles, turn left onto the road signed for the Alhambra Creek Staging Area, and then go 0.8 mile to the parking lot.

From Highway 4, take the Alhambra Avenue exit south, and then go right onto Alhambra Valley Road. Drive 1.7 miles, turn left on Reliez Valley Road for 0.5 mile, and then go right for 0.8 mile.

Take the Alhambra Creek Trail past riparian habitat, buckeye, live oak, and blue oak to a signed trail junction at 0.9 mile, where you bear right onto the Spengler Trail. Climb away from the creek past coast live oak, poison oak, coyote brush, and California laurel to two ponds called Marich

Smooth-sloped, grassy hillsides highlight the Briones region

Lagoons at 1.6 miles, where you turn left onto the Old Briones Road Trail. Climb gradually along gently rolling grassy hillsides that typify the Briones region to a signed trail junction at 1.9 miles, where you bear left on the Briones Crest Trail.

Take the spur trail on the left at 2.5 miles to a bench marking the top of 1,483-foot Briones Peak, the highest spot in Briones Regional Park. To the north you can see the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers converge into Suisun Bay; San Pablo Bay sprawls northwesterly, Mount Tamalpais looms westward beyond the Berkeley hills, and Mount Diablo juts to the east.

Bear left at the next signed trail junction, and then climb briefly and go right onto the signed

### *View from Briones Peak*



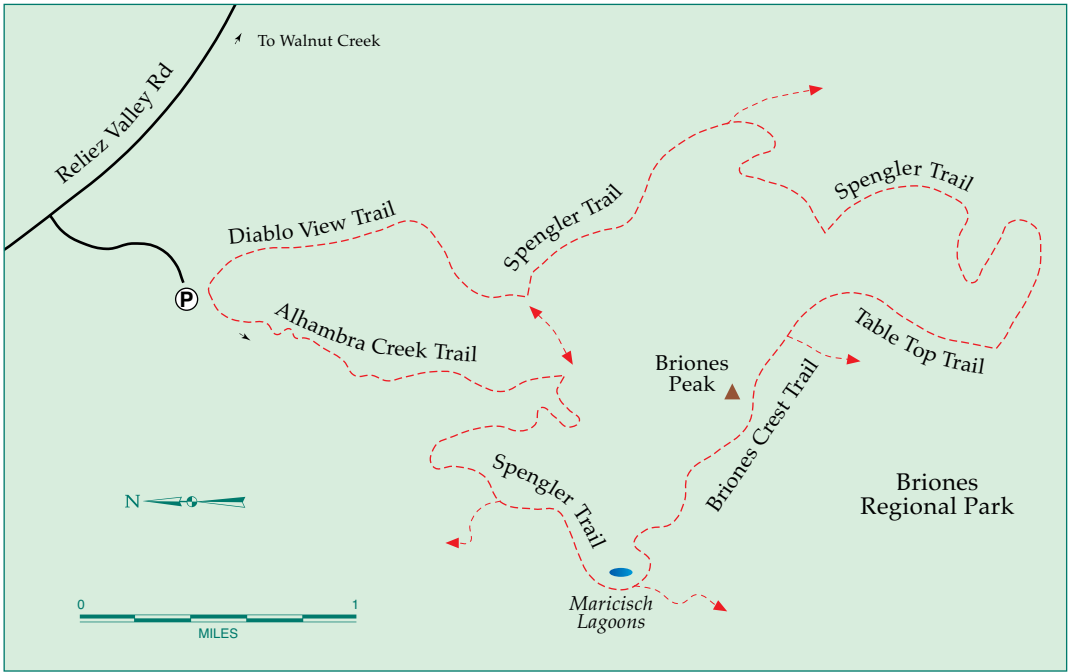


Table Top Trail. Walk past chaparral and scattered coast live oak to a signed trail junction at 3.3 miles, where you turn left back onto the Spengler Trail. This wide road plunges steeply at times through a canyon shaded by coast live oak, huge toyon, buckeye, California laurel, and the occasional bigleaf maple.

Ignore an unsigned trail junction near a water tank and continue left to a signed trail junction at 5.7 miles, where you turn right. Bear right

at an unsigned trail junction and then left at a signed trail junction at 6.3 miles. Continue left on the Spengler Trail at a three-way, unsigned trail junction 25 yards farther. The trail stays shaded while dropping 0.4 mile to an unsigned fork, where you bear left for a brief climb. Go right onto the Diablo View Trail at 7.3 miles. Turn left at a signed trail junction 0.5 mile farther. After 100 yards the trail drops to the Alhambra Creek canyon and to the trailhead at 8.4 miles.

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## WILDCAT CANYON REGIONAL PARK TRAILS

**Length:** 11.5 miles round-trip

**Hiking time:** 6 hours

**High point:** 1,250 feet

**Total elevation gain:** 1,400 feet

**Difficulty:** moderate

**Season:** year-round

**Water:** bring your own

**Map:** USGS 7.5' Richmond

**Information:** East Bay Regional Park District