



photo LANI ALLEN

TrailMix

THE VALLEY'S IRON HORSE TRAIL IS MADE FOR WALKING, BIKING, SKATING, AND JUST PLAIN HORSING AROUND

by PATRICIA KUTZA

HOW DO YOU DISCOVER all that is unique about a city? You can get a glimpse of it by driving, but to get a real feel for what makes a city unique, you have to get off its very beaten path and walk. To get to know the real Valley, there's probably no better way than to explore the Iron Horse Regional Trail. »

Flat and Far

The Iron Horse Regional Trail follows the former Southern Pacific Railroad, created in 1891 and abandoned in 1977. Meandering over twenty-four miles from Concord to Dublin, the trail winds its way through commercial and residential areas, in addition to open spaces. A full twenty feet wide and mostly paved, the trail attracts not only bike riders, but commuters on their way to work, kids en route to school, inline skaters, joggers, equestrians, and folks just out for a leisurely stroll. According to East Bay Regional Park District park ranger Terry Dep, one of the main benefits of this trail is its flatness, a bicyclist's dream.

Should intrepid explorers decide to follow the trail in its entirety, they would pass regional retail hubs such as the Willows Shopping Center in Pleasant Hill and the shops and restaurants of downtown Danville; BART stations (Pleasant Hill, Dublin, Pleasanton); cultural landmarks like the Danville Railroad Museum and the Danville and Walnut Creek libraries; and a host of public parks. The trail rambles through patches of open space



throughout, as well as intersection points with several other trails, including the Ygnacio Canal Trail, the Contra Costa Canal Trail, the Las Trampas-to-Mt. Diablo Regional Trail, and the Briones-to-Mt. Diablo Trail. According to plans, the Iron Horse Trail is slated to extend an additional nine miles in the near future, making a continuous path from Livermore to Suisun Bay and Martinez.

Yielding to Horses

Before heading out on the trail, the best starting point is online, at the East Bay Regional Park District's Web site, EBParks.org. Here you will find detailed sectional maps showing trail staging areas (parking), drinking water availability, restrooms, mileage,

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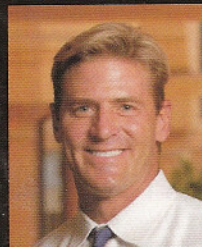
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bay tripper » up front

and various points of interest along the trail. Equestrians on horseback are permitted on the same path as bicyclists, hikers, skaters, and joggers, so it's smart to brush up on trail etiquette, which is also posted on the Web site. Normally bicyclists yield to equestrians and hikers, and then hikers to equestrians. The Iron Horse Regional Trail is also wheelchair-accessible.

Three to Try

Inline skaters are welcome on all parts of the trail, but not the trail's entire surface is welcoming to them. Some parts are smoother than others, so it's helpful to have advance knowledge about favorable routes. At the California Inline Skating Web site, CASKating.com, skaters can find three different Iron Horse Trail routes, all rated for beginning skaters. The shortest one, eleven miles in length, takes skaters through the towns of Walnut Creek, Alamo, and Danville. Water is available at three different locations, and parking options include downtown Alamo and Danville, where skaters can also visit the Danville Railroad Museum.

Ready, Set, Volkwalk!

For those looking for something different the Iron Horse Trail is also a favorite of volksmarchers, participants of a non-competitive walking sport, with origins in Germany and twenty-six Volks Clubs in California. According to Tom Bressemer, president of Vaca Valley Volks Club, there are no rigid rules to the sport, and while their clubs welcome new members walkers don't need to join a club to participate in their events, usually walks of ten kilometers (6.2 miles). Their self-guided Iron Horse Trail route, a year-round event, winds its way through residential areas, parks, and shopping areas, and can be found online. A free map is also available at the Walking Company in Walnut Creek. VLM

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

East Bay Regional Park District
(925) 687-3419, EBParks.org
Vaca Valley Volks Club
(510) 758-0532, VacaVolks.org