

exploring

Solo or Group?

Hiking in the Forest of Nisene Marks

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Solitude can be a wonderful antidote. Being out in nature alone can be comforting, unless you get lost, fall, or run into a mountain lion. Now, however, fear of COVID-19, old age, and fewer community activities have led to isolation. This is why I'm happy to report on a group hike in the Forest of Nisene Marks sponsored by the Loma Prieta Museum.

The July hike was a great success. After months of staying home, it was good to be with friends and neighbors. When more than 40 people signed up, half the group went on Friday, half on Saturday. This made it easier to hear Paul Karz, our senior interpreter aide. It also helped us warn each other of speeding bikers.

We parked at the Porter Family Picnic Area, about one mile into the park. Even with frequent stops for informative talks, it took less than three hours to make our three- to four-mile round trip.

The redwoods formed a beautiful, shady tunnel, but our day was more than a walk in the woods. We learned about nature and history.

Although all indications of the town of Loma Prieta had been removed, our interpreter enriched the experience with his commentary and visual aids.

Loma Prieta was a real town with a store, hotel, Wells Fargo office, post office, railroad spur, and a large water tank. Some of the employees had homes there. Up the hill was a schoolhouse. Paul also talked about the survival and renewal of the logged redwood forest.

I hope that the Loma Prieta Museum sponsors more tours like this.

I've been on several other group hikes in Nisene Marks. The first (and longest) was led by Sandy Lydon, known as the history dude and retired professor of history at Cabrillo College. Sandy's on-site observations and stories made the hike worthwhile. He has taken students into the Forest of Nisene Marks for over 30 years. He wrote the history of Aptos Canyon for the park's general plan, and he helped convince the State Parks Commission to adopt the park. All this, and he told great stories with enthusiasm and humor.

We saw the infamous "incline," a steep



The village of Loma Prieta in 1890





APTOS CREEK FIRE ROAD	
LOMA PRIETA GRADE	0.2 MI
LOMA PRIETA MILL SITE	0.5 MI
APTOS CREEK TRAIL	1.6 MI
TOP OF THE INCLINE	2.8 MI
WHITES LAGOON ROAD	4.8 MI
SAND POINT OVERLOOK	5.8 MI
BUZZARD LAGOON ROAD	11.2 MI



of horsetail ferns. We entered a redwood grove, complete with a shaded field of redwood sorrel and sword- and five-finger ferns. We visited Monte Vista Station, a logging camp and tourist site where nothing remains but a few twisted rails.

Another quarter-mile upstream took us to Five Finger Falls, a little waterfall that bursts out of a rocky cliff to fall 15 feet into an emerald green pool. This section of the hike is now closed.

We retraced our steps back up the trail,

past the intersection with the Big Slide Trail, continued another four miles to the Aptos Creek Fire Road, and up and down many, many switchbacks to the Porter Family Picnic Area.

It was a long hike, but if Five Finger Falls is open, I would do it again.

Although these two hikes were quite different, both show the value of group hiking, especially when you have a great interpreter/leader.

If you can walk and listen, you should sign up to get outside together.

rail line that lowered stacks of split wood on narrow-gauge flatcars by wire cable and a steam donkey. It lowered these cars 600 feet in elevation over a distance of 2250 feet. In case of emergency, a rider would jump off the car and ring one of the bells next to the track. They rang often. Fortunately, the incline was no longer in service.

We took the Aptos Creek Fire Road to White's Lagoon Trail, about five miles north of the Porter Family gate. The lagoon was shallow and thick with reeds, grasses, and willows. We saw many signs of feral pigs.

We cut back to the Big Slide Trail, which took us about a mile and a half to Aptos Creek Trail. The first half mile was a gradual descent, but then we plunged steeply down about 600 feet in elevation through a series of switchbacks. When we reached Aptos Creek Trail, we could look down about 150 feet over the canyon. We could also see several long fissures from the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake.

Aptos Creek Trail led us to one of the most beautiful areas of the park. We stayed high on the canyon wall for about half a mile, and then dropped down into a thicket

