

# MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER  
Governor

MIKE CHRISMAN  
Secretary for Resources

RUTH COLEMAN  
Director, California State Parks



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**A**t the eastern fringe of the San Francisco Bay Region, Mount Diablo, elevation 3,849 feet, stands alone on the edge of California's great Central Valley. At this point, the Coast Range consists only of low hills, none high enough to block the view from the upper slopes of the mountain. As a result, the view is spectacular.

**The View From the Top** — Many visitors to Mount Diablo head straight for the summit to enjoy the famous view. Summer days are sometimes hazy, and the best viewing is often on the day after a winter storm. Then, you can look to the west, beyond the Golden Gate Bridge, to the Farallon Islands; southeast to the James Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton at 4,213 feet elevation; south to Mount Loma Prieta in the Santa Cruz Mountains at 3,791 feet elevation; north to Mount Saint Helena in the Coast Range at 4,344 feet, and still farther north to Mount Lassen in the Cascades at 10,466 feet. North and east of Mount Diablo, the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers meet to form the twisting waterways of the Delta. To the east beyond California's great Central Valley, the crest of the Sierra Nevada seems to float in space. With binoculars, you may even be able to pick out Half Dome in Yosemite National Park.

## HISTORY

Mount Diablo is a sacred mountain to California Indian people. Just about every California Indian community who viewed Mount Diablo would, at one time or another, make a pilgrimage to the summit area for ceremonies. The reason Mount Diablo is so sacred to the California Indian people is that it was the creation point for the Miwok people or genesis for some California Indian people.

In 1851, the mountaintop was selected as the starting point for a survey of the public domain. Ignoring the excitement of the Gold Rush, Leander Ransom and his men erected a flagpole at the summit of Mount Diablo and began to extend the base and meridian lines that we use to this day in our official land surveys. As a matter of fact, Mount Diablo base and meridian lines are referred to in legal descriptions of real estate throughout two-thirds of California and parts of Nevada and Oregon.

Toll roads up the mountain were opened in 1874, and for many years there were two stages every day connecting Walnut Creek and Danville with Mountain House, a 16-room hotel about three miles from the summit. The Stage Road, near Pine Canyon, was one of the original stage-coach line routes. The hotel offered all conveniences and was known for its excellent food. Wedding ceremonies were a frequent occurrence at the hotel, and celebrities from all over Europe and America were among the visitors. In those days, it was widely held that you hadn't seen the West if you hadn't watched a sunset, sunrise, or full moon from the upper slopes of the mountain.

Business at the hotel declined after the summit observation platform burned in 1891, and shortly thereafter the hotel burned down as well. The toll roads were reopened in 1915, so that the view from the summit was once again available to all.

In 1921, a parcel of land on the mountain was designated a state park, and much of the rest of the mountain was declared a game refuge. Standard Oil placed a ten-million-candlepower aerial navigation beacon on the summit in 1928.



*ABOVE: In 1935 the transbay ferries were still running, the Bay Bridge was nearing completion, and San Francisco itself was rapidly assuming its modern appearance. Then, as now, Mount Diablo rose above it all, serene and aloof, majestically dominating the eastern horizon. BELOW: View of Castle Rock from Shell Ridge.*



The beacon was so powerful that it could be seen by ships 100 miles at sea. Finally, in 1931, the state acquired more land for Mount Diablo State Park, and the park was formally dedicated and opened to the public.

### NATURAL HISTORY

Much of the rock that makes up Mount Diablo is sedimentary in origin. It was laid down millions of years ago on the floor of the ocean. Within the last one to two million years, a piece of hard, red 160-million-year-old Franciscan rock was pushed up through six to eight miles of overlying rock and soil, tilting and distorting the rock layers and in some places turning them completely upside down. As a result, the fossilized remains of many sea creatures, as well as those of mastodons, saber-toothed cats and three-toe horses have been discovered here.



Elevations in the park range from 300 to 3,849 feet. This wide range of elevations creates broad variations in temperature, rainfall and wind exposure that have resulted in a wide variety of plant life on the mountain. Summers are hot and dry, so many people prefer to visit in spring and fall. The park is also popular in winter, when Bay Area residents occasionally enjoy the unusual experience of a snowfall on the mountain's peak.

Most of the park is typical central California oak and grassland country with extensive

areas of chaparral. Riparian woodland occurs on the lower slopes of the mountain, where the streams have water in them throughout most of the year. Several isolated stands of knobcone pine occur within the park, and foothill pine is found in many places. The northernmost groves of coulter pine occur on the lower, northerly slopes of the mountain, near the old mining ghost towns of Nortonville and Somersville just outside the park. Other trees include the coast live oak, bigleaf maple, California laurel (Oregon myrtle), Maul oak, blue oak and buckeye. In all, over 400 species of plants have been identified within the park's almost 20,000 acres.

Wildlife is also abundant. Coastal black-tailed deer, raccoons, California ground squirrels, eastern fox squirrels and gray foxes are often seen, but striped and spotted skunks, bobcats, mountain lions, coyotes, deer mice, cottontail rabbits, black-tailed hares and many other animals call the mountain home. Mount Diablo is known to harbor red-legged frogs, tarantulas, and the rare Alameda whipsnake, as well as its cousin the northern rattlesnake.

### POINTS OF INTEREST

**Summit Building and Museum** — Constructed in the late 1930s by the California Conservation Corps, the sandstone for the building was quarried from Rock City. Remnants of ancient fossils can be found on the building.



*Unusual snowfall covers the Summit Building.*

**The Fire Interpretive Trail** — Just below the summit, this trail showcases the natural recovery process that is underway following a 6,000-acre fire in 1977. Some spectacular vistas can be enjoyed along the way. The first half of this gentle 0.7-mile trail is accessible to visitors in wheelchairs.

**Rock City** — You will find unusually large sandstone formations and small caves here.

**Climbing Rocks and Castle Rock** — These are popular places for rock climbing. Check with the ranger for regulations and the best approach.

**Fossil Ridge** — Evidence of previous residents is embedded in these rocks. Please leave them for future visitors to see.

**Macedo Ranch** — An excellent staging area for horseriders, bicyclists and hikers, located on the western side of the park.

**Deer Flat** — You are likely to see some of the mountain's natural wildlife as you take this moderately strenuous 1.6-mile hike from Juniper Camp.

**Mitchell Canyon Staging Area** — This is the main access point to trails on the mountain's north side. From here you can hike to Deer



Flat (3.7 miles) or all the way to the summit (6.8 miles) by way of Juniper Camp.

Interpretive

Center is open on weekends from 8:00 a.m to 2:00 p.m.

**Diablo Valley Overlook** — From here, 2,900 feet above sea level, you can see the Golden Gate.

Guided hikes and other interpretive events are conducted by the park staff. Publications of the park's history and natural history and a detailed topographic hiking map are for sale in the park office, at entrance stations and at the Summit, where knowledgeable docents are available to answer your questions. The summit museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., November through February and 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., April through October.

### PICNICKING

There are more than 50 picnic sites, each with table and barbeque stove, scattered along the park's paved roads. There are also three group picnic areas that can accommodate from 25 to 100 people each. They can be reserved through park headquarters.



### CAMPING

Mt. Diablo has 56 campsites with hot showers and flush toilets. Some sites will accommodate RVs up to 20 feet; trailers are not recommended due to road conditions.

Group sites are available with running water and pit toilets. Some have horse facilities.

Campsite reservations can be made by phone up to seven months or as little as 48 hours in advance by calling (800)444-7275. Outside of the United States, call (916) 638-5883. Reservation fees can be charged to VISA®, Discover® Card or MasterCard®.

Group camping reservations can be made up to seven months in advance.

### A NOTE FOR BICYCLISTS

Mountain bikes may be ridden on paved roads, maintained fire roads and authorized trails. The three trails currently open to mountain bikes are:

- Summit Trail from South Gate Road through Dan Cook Canyon.
- Mother's Trail from Angel Kerley Road to the connector trail to Burma Road.
- North Peak Trail from Summit Road at Devil's Elbow to Prospector's Gap.

Cyclists should see park staff for other rules and regulations concerning trail use.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Alcoholic beverages are NOT allowed in the park.
- Dogs are allowed only in developed areas in the park. They must be kept on a leash during the day and in an enclosed vehicle or tent at night. Dogs are NOT permitted on trails or fire roads.
- Fires are a continuing hazard; weather conditions may restrict smoking or prohibit fires or even close the park during periods of extreme fire danger. See park staff for specific information. Fires are only allowed in the park's barbeques or your portable camp stove. Bring your own fuel. Collection of firewood is prohibited in the park.
- Poison oak is found throughout the park. It can cause an unpleasant rash that can even be transmitted by touching clothing that has brushed against the plant. Stay on the trails and avoid this hazard.
- Plants and animals – even rattlesnakes – are protected by law. This is their home, and you are the visitor. To avoid rattlers, watch where you are hiking, and if you see one, give it a wide berth. It is no more anxious for an encounter than you are.
- Park hours are 8:00 a.m. to sunset daily. Gates close at sunset and are locked at night.

Mt. Diablo Interpretive Association is a nonprofit organization devoted to the promotion of interpretive, scientific and educational projects to help the general public enjoy and become knowledgeable about Mt. Diablo, a unique mountain island within an ever-encroaching urban development.

**Mt. Diablo Interpretive Association**  
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Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346  
(925) 927-7222  
[www.mdia.org](http://www.mdia.org)

# Mount Diablo STATE PARK

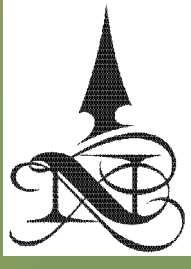
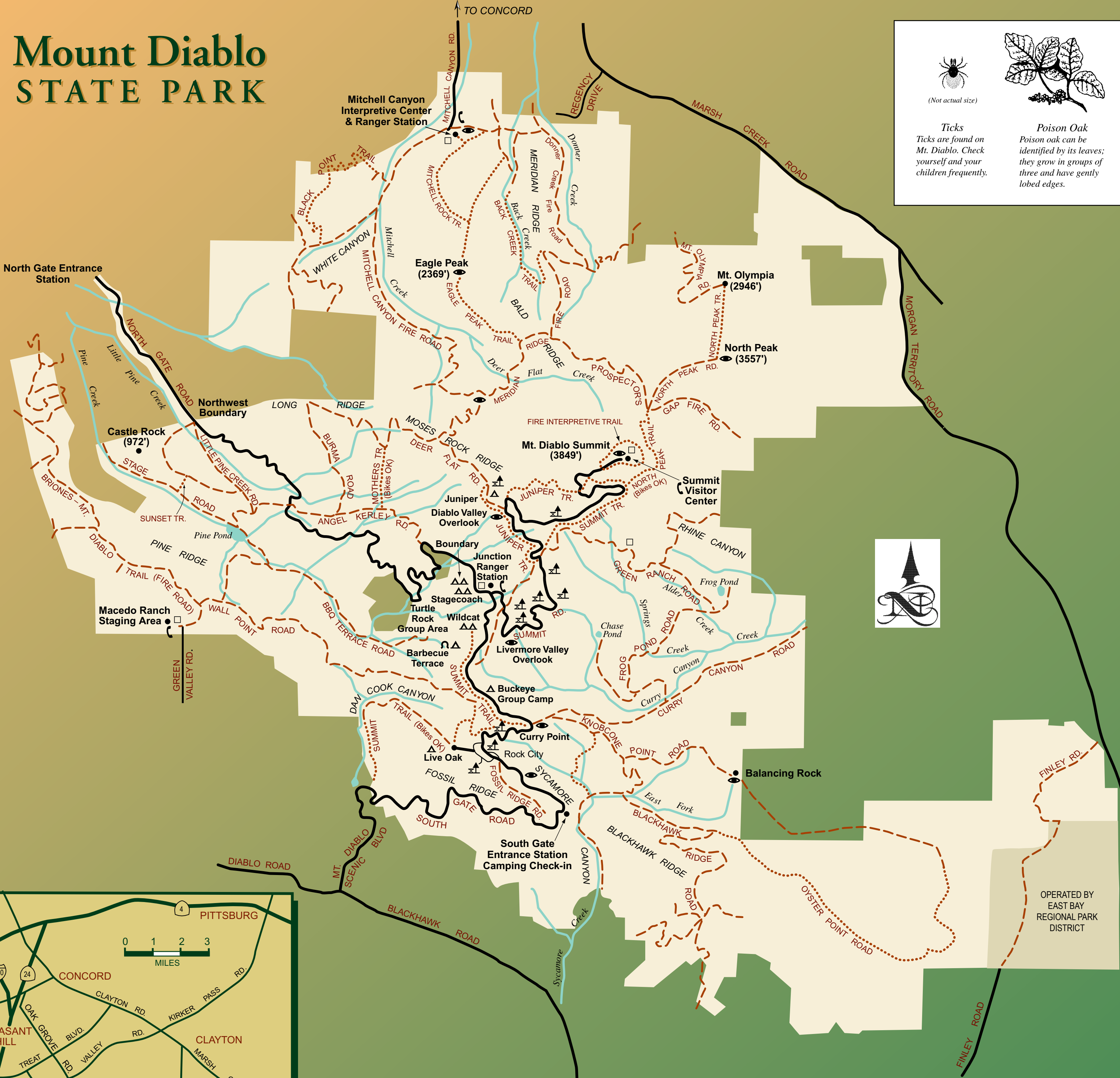


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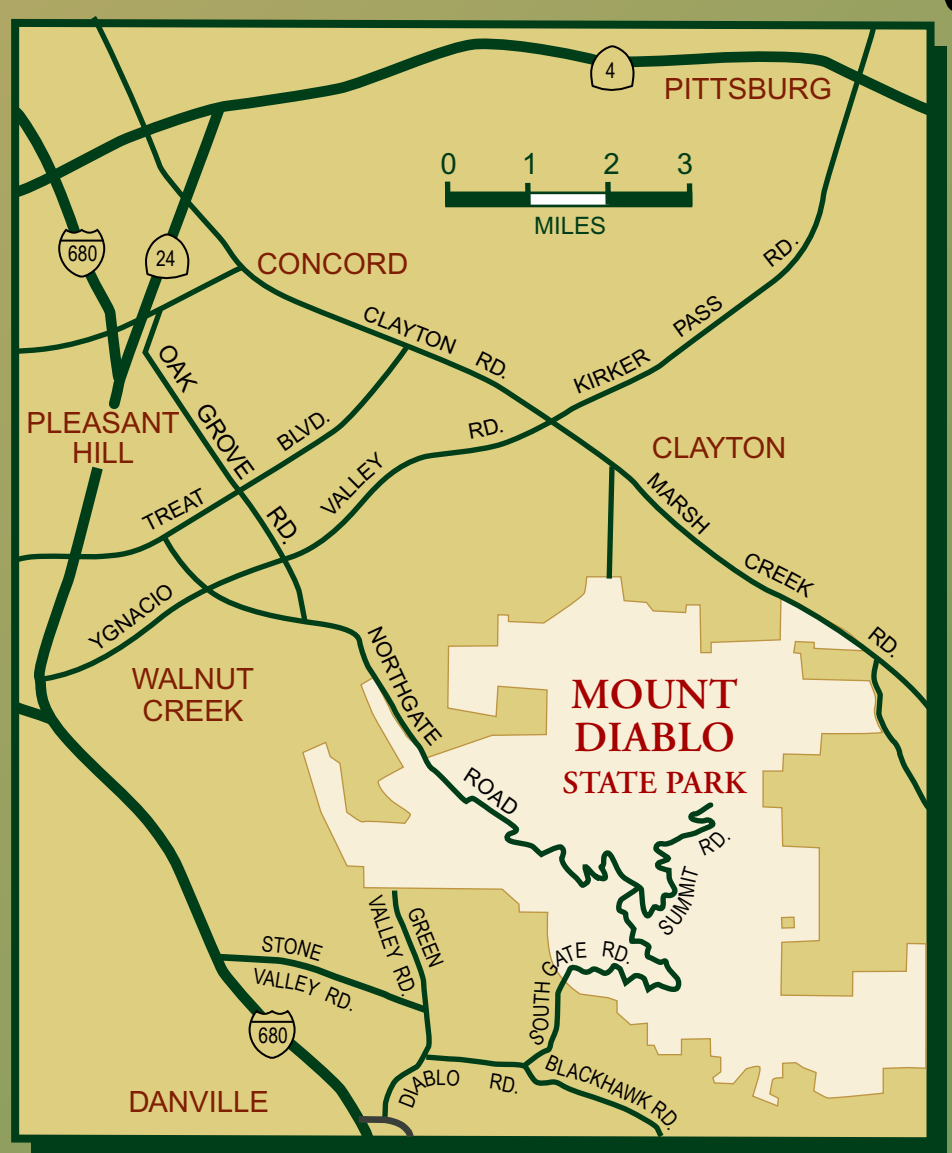
**Ticks**  
Ticks are found on Mt. Diablo. Check yourself and your children frequently.



**Poison Oak**  
Poison oak can be identified by its leaves; they grow in groups of three and have gently lobed edges.



OPERATED BY EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT



Most land adjacent to the park is private property. No trespassing without owner's permission.

- PAVED ROADS
- FIRE ROADS (HIKING BUT NO VEHICLES)
- HIKING TRAILS
- CAMPING
- GROUP CAMPING
- HORSE CAMPING
- PICNIC AREA
- POINT OF INTEREST
- RESTROOMS
- TELEPHONE