

The F Street Trailhead is a Hidden Gateway & How the Franklin Hills Were Saved

F Street Trailhead, Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline

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Hike Start: top of F Street

Distance: 0.8 miles roundtrip, or longer

Time: 45 minutes roundtrip, or longer

Moderate hike

What are the Franklin Hills? How were they saved? Why go there? They are the scenic backdrop for Martinez and its western border from Highway 4 to the Carquinez Strait. They're a constant—everyone in Martinez loves them, whether you grew up or moved here—and they've resisted change. At the simplest we love them because they're our backyard, they mean Martinez, and most of us see them every day.

In May 2020 Martinez residents are sheltering in place from the coronavirus pandemic, luckily with nearby access to wonderful open spaces. Martinez is surrounded by four regional parks. The recently renamed Radke-Martinez Regional Shoreline to the north and Briones Regional Park to the south are the most well-known. Waterbird Regional Preserve is east across Highway 680.

Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline includes the Franklin Hills west of downtown. Most people who go there use the Nejedly staging area along Carquinez Scenic Drive, or the entrances further west where the George Miller Trail begins. Less well known is the F Street Trailhead at the south edge of Alhambra High School.

This article is in two major parts. The first is an introduction to the F Street Trailhead and canyon, from which you can explore Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline. You can pick up a map at the gate, which will help you. At its simplest, just walk up the canyon and back. Or, when you get on top of Franklin Ridge, go left or right as far as you like, then retrace your steps back.

The second part explains a little more about the park's history and how it was saved by the "Friends of the Franklin Hills" and others.

The Canyon

F Street Trailhead is located at the top of F Street between the Martinez Hillside Apartments and Alhambra High School, leading into a beautiful shady green canyon.

0.4 miles and 15-20 minutes will get you up the canyon into the Franklin Hills and Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline, to sunny Franklin Ridge. First you pass through a regional park gate. Soon trails lead left or right; use your map if you want to explore them.

The main trail route goes straight up the canyon, through another gate. The unnamed moderately sloped trail is a hidden gem and a gateway to incredible views and thousands of acres of preserved land. The steepest slope is near the start and might discourage some people but keep going. The steep part lasts just a few hundred feet and, as I said, it is shaded live oak-bay woodland. It's often breezy too, funneling winds from the west, so it's really pleasant. Overall, the climb is moderate.

In 15-20 minutes, you get to the grassland Franklin Ridge and the slopes are even easier. That first 0.4 miles gets you to incredible 360-degree views of town; Mt. Diablo; the Delta, Central Valley and Sierra Nevada range to the east; Mt. Wanda, Las Trampas, and Briones to the south; and the Franklin Canyon-Highway 4 corridor and Mt. Tamalpais to the west.

Blue oaks climb the hills, live oak and bay fill the canyons, and giant valley oaks stud the grasslands.

You can return down the canyon or you can extend your hike for miles in either direction—the Hulet Hornbeck trail along the ridge climbs to the right, north to the larger parts of the regional park, and then down to Carquinez Scenic Drive (Snake Road).

Or take the Hulet Hornbeck trail left, as it descends south, weaving back and forth through the knolls down to the John Muir House. The trail is a pleasure, slightly downhill with views toward Mt. Diablo that take your breath away.

Once you near Highway 4 and the John Muir House, you can return to your start by turning around, or you can walk back through the neighborhoods at the bottom of the Franklin Hills back to F Street, or you can continue under Highway 4 in a large tunnel to Mt. Wanda or Briones.

On the trail signs there are lots of medallions indicating three long regional trails that follow the same route and extend even farther including the 550 mile Bay Area Ridge Trail and the eventually 300+ mile Mokelumne Coast to Crest Trail. One trail was pivotal in saving the ridge, the California State Riding and Hiking Trail, and had been dedicated years earlier.

I would be surprised if more than half of Martinez residents know about Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline. More surprised if they know the name of Franklin Ridge and the Franklin Hills. And shocked if they know that a small group of 10-20 Martinez residents galvanized thousands of Martinez citizens in an effort in the mid 1980's and 1990's that resisted one development after another, and then helped pass funding measures to acquire the threatened parcels for the new regional preserve.

Bonus information – [Tom Stienstra's article on the Franklin Ridge](#)

Franklin Ridge

Franklin Ridge, the Franklin Hills, and Franklin Canyon threaded by Franklin Creek are all named for the same man, San Francisco pioneer Edward Franklin who came to California from England in 1849 for the Gold Rush and ended up in the mercantile business.

Don Vincente Martinez, son of the Comandante of the Presidio of San Francisco, had built the two-story Martinez Adobe ranch house in 1849, using sun-dried adobe bricks. Just four years later in 1853, he sold about 1700 acres including the Adobe to Franklin.

It is unclear whether Franklin ever lived on the property, but he had ongoing problems with squatters, trespassers and theft of timber and grass. Several owners later, Dr. John T. Strenzel, the father-in-law of famous naturalist John Muir, bought the property in 1874.

John Muir was the founder of the American conservation movement and one of Martinez' most famous residents but conservation didn't really make much progress locally until 1964 when East Bay Regional Park District expanded to include much of Contra Costa County. Martinez resident Hulet Hornbeck of the Contra Costa Park Council was hired as the Park District's first acquisition chief and in 1966 helped create Briones Regional Park as the first central county regional park.

Many older cities have lost their neighboring open spaces. Martinez is an exception. But its land use history is complicated, starting with large grants for Spanish ranchos that became increasingly fragmented. In earlier days land subdivision and creating legal parcels was almost as easy as surveying a map and legally recording it in public records.

Much of the area west of downtown had been surveyed that way, some maps showing as many as 1500 parcels with no suggestion that they included steep hills and canyons. Early development projects didn't consider impacts on residents and over time California and cities regulated subdivision and development more carefully.

For over a hundred years the steep, landslide prone Franklin Hills were largely left alone as subdivisions extended south through flatter orchards, especially from 1900-1950. The city's population began growing rapidly again in the 1960s—58%--and the 1980s, when it grew 42%. With Briones, watershed lands, and ranches to the south; the waterfront to the north; and the Franklin Hills to the west; Martinez retained its small-town charm.

Ted Radke (1945-2016) & Kathy Radke (1939-2011)

We are all familiar with people who discover Martinez and fall in love with it. That was the case for Ted and Kathy Radke who moved to Martinez in 1969. Ted grew up in Richmond and was getting a Master's degree at San Francisco State University when he met Kathy. In 1969 they moved to Martinez. They helped found Contra Costa

Ecology Action. Together they advocated for the creation of Martinez Regional Shoreline, among many environmental causes.

In 1971 Ted was elected to a term on the Martinez City Council. He served as a spokesman for the protection of the Franklin Hills and Martinez shoreline from development, initially through zoning. Residents of Martinez offered strong support for open space extending from the John Muir National Historic Site to the Martinez waterfront.

Among Ted's achievements was Martinez's first General Plan in 1972, and in 1973 the Central Martinez Specific Area Plan. The plans designated much of the Franklin Hills as open space. That was helpful but was not permanent and didn't provide public access. And no money was available to acquire land for parks and open space at that time.

General Plans and zoning can always be changed, too, and development allowed. (Thousand Friends of Martinez successfully helped pass Measure I in 2018, which requires a vote of the people of Martinez for changes to designated open space parcels).

Ted and Kathy had helped engage the East Bay Regional Park District in protecting the waterfront. When Ted was elected to the board of the East Bay Regional Park District in 1978, he was in a position to do more. Kathy was later elected to the city council for two terms. Local residents continued to oppose development projects on the sensitive hillside lands.

Barbara Woodburn (1940-2019)

Like Ted Radke, Barbara Woodburn grew up in Richmond after World War II, where she met her future husband Bob. They loved to hike over the hills and that's how they discovered Martinez. They moved here in 1972 to a house on St. Mary's Street. Like Ted and Kathy Radke, they were involved in Vietnam War opposition, civil rights and environmental causes. Unfortunately, Bob's health failed, and he died in 1986.

After Barbara passed away in 2019, Harriet Burt recalled in the Martinez Gazette, "In some ways, Barbara never got over his death, but she used it for what her son calls 'a real calling to service'."

Illegal grading had taken place in the hills above the Woodburn house, by a landowner anticipating future development. Burt wrote it started with a rainstorm on the evening of the day Bob Woodburn died, January 7, 1986. "The water pouring down from the Franklin Hills caused a slide and flooding at the Woodburn home in the lower part of the hills near Canyon Way. Located at the junction of Serrano and Saint Mary's streets, the home and property was in the direct line of the flow of water from the hills. The January 7 storm caused considerable damage to the Woodburn home and property."

"At the very same time, developers were preparing applications for housing developments on the hillsides from Highway 4 to Carquinez Scenic Drive despite the

fact that there was always a lot of run-off with associated property damage on the residences in the neighborhoods and the Alhambra campus after any big storm.”

“As the Woodburns and their neighbors struggled with the 1986 storm’s havoc, eleven people and their families including Barbara and her neighbors and some who did not live in the neighborhood but who seriously cared about the environment anywhere in the City, formed the Friends of the Franklin Hills to fight the development proposals.”

In a 2008 video for the Martinez Oral History Project, Woodburn recalled “The night Bob was buried, we were having the wake, and we were watching my kitchen separate from the rest of the house, and my sons handed me a notice of a planning commission hearing to put 500 houses on this property that was sliding out from under us, above us, the swath from the cut above the later Funk house, Highway 4 clear to the cemeteries, completely across the ridgeline, Beniciafied. And they said Dad would want me to do this. We’d done it before when they came in piecemeal, here and here and here. Jean and Art Will had been a part of that, and our neighborhood was very active in doing that.”

A consortium of 21 landowners had gotten together and were asking the city to consider four different alternatives of the “Franklin Hills Specific Area Plan” with as many as 500 houses in the canyons and slopes of the Franklin Hills and up on Franklin Ridge. With other development plans, as many as 1500 houses were being considered west of town.

Barbara’s husband’s death, her house flooded. The town was still filled with flood debris, the hills were still geysering water, but that weekend Barbara began collecting hundreds of signatures on, as she said, “very damp petitions,” opposing the “Franklin Hills Specific Area Plan.” She and her sons posted flyers about the public hearing on telephone poles in the neighborhood.

A few days later, at the first Planning Commission hearing, just 4 or 5 people showed up. Scott and Katie Williams who lived on Arlington Way had seen one of the flyers on a telephone pole in their neighborhood.

Sharon Hicks described water geysering out of the hills onto her property. Barbara later drove up all the access roads leading into the hills looking for water geysers to find Sharon, who remembers that kids were riding inner tubes down Arreba Street on the runoff.

Five minutes before the Planning Commission meeting, Scott Williams called his high school buddy Bob Doyle, who was acquisition chief at East Bay Regional Park District. ‘Is the Regional Park District considering a park in the Franklin Hills?’ Bob said, ‘no, there’s nothing in the works’, but he gave Scott what he considered the most important information in the whole fight: ‘However, if there is a public hue and cry asking us to look at it, we’ll take a look’. Scott’s mantra became: “The Franklin Hills should be parkland.”

The Planning Commission ignored the opposition, refusing even to require an environmental impact report (EIR) though impacts were obvious and the EIR was legally required.

Friends of the Franklin Hills

With Barbara leading the charge, people began working, a core group of 10 or 11. Barbara and other leaders were generous in giving credit to others such as Ted Radke and Mel Coroni who had had struggled so hard during the General Plan fights in 1972 and 73; Jean Will, who helped fund the opposition, Scott and Katie Williams, Cathy Robishaw, Sharon Hicks, the Azolas, Tim Platt, Sherida Bush, Paul Craig and Kay Cox, Kathy Radke, Jack Humphreys.

After Barbara was appointed to the Planning Commission and then elected to the city council, where she served from 1990 to 2002, Sharon Hicks took over as organizer of Friends of the Franklin Hills. Hicks called Woodburn “the General” for her leadership.

At every meeting they demanded an EIR. They learned about environmental regulations, they organized, they educated people. The public hearings were often packed.

According to Sharon Hicks, “What saved us was the guy who went in and illegally bulldozed the hills ahead of time, they slid, and that stopped the process awhile and that gave us time to organize. They were going to build apartment complexes and high rises on the hill.” The newsletter mailing list grew to 1500 people.

Scott said, “The issue crossed all lines in Martinez, between serious environmentalists, old Italian families, industrialists. They all loved the Franklin Hills.” The city was on the wrong side of public sentiment.

Eventually, the city blinked. The necessary environmental report was required for the Franklin Hills Specific Area Plan. It slowed the process and it showed just what people expected: landslide danger, drainage issues and so on. The ridge was complicated because of a long-standing trail easement of the California State Riding and Hiking Trail which the activists had uncovered.

In 1987 a low-density version of the Plan was adopted, with even lower densities above 350' and on steeper slopes. There was still no money for park acquisition, but land values would be more reasonable.

Prop. 70 and Measure AA

The real break came when Prop 70, a state resources bond, passed in June 1988. It provided the first funds for the regional park district to begin acquiring land in the Franklin Hills. Although Prop 70 and other state bonds needed 50% to pass, in the East Bay it received support from more than 2/3rds of voters.

Local measures are harder. They require 2/3rds approval. Given the Prop. 70 vote total, conservation organizations including Save Mount Diablo, the Sierra Club, Greenbelt Alliance and others saw a short window of opportunity before the November 1988 election for a second, local funding measure. Ted Radke helped convince East Bay Regional Park District to sponsor Measure AA, which proposed \$225 million in funding and Martinez residents convinced the District to include funds specifically for the Franklin Hills.

To endorse Measure AA, Woodburn's and opponents of the "Franklin Hills" development for the first time took the name "Friends of the Franklin Hills." Along with other environmental groups, FOFH carried the Regional Park District's printed campaign literature but they also printed their own. They carried the campaign pieces to every house in Martinez.

Measure AA just barely passed but its highest approval percentage in the East Bay was in Martinez, a similar level of support as in Berkeley. The Regional Park District recognized Friends of the Franklin Hills for its outstanding work. Measure AA earmarked \$4.1 million dollars to acquire parkland between Martinez and Crockett. Because of the Friends' efforts, Martinez received the first funding from the measure in 1989.

Pushed by Radke, the Regional Park District quickly began picking up properties in the Franklin Hills, each new piece making other future development less likely. Measure AA included funds for cities' park projects too and would provide a match if the funds were used for land acquisition. Radke, Friends of the Franklin Hills, and Martinez residents convinced the city to use its AA money for several properties, including part of the canyon above F Street.

The first part of Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline opened to the public in 1989. The park now includes 1,568 acres of bluffs and shoreline along Carquinez Scenic Drive between the town of Crockett and the Franklin Hills overlooking Martinez.

The first phase of Friends of the Franklin Hills' work took 18 months. The group waxed and waned over the years. Sometimes it was just Barbara Woodburn, Sharon Hicks, and Sherida Bush. It responded to development proposals and pushed for park acquisitions for over 20 years. Sharon Hicks later moved to Ohio to take care of her sister.

I spoke with her recently. She said, "I got involved because I worried about my house, and then I got involved with the community. I met wonderful people, so many wonderful people who loved what I loved, to hike, to save the greenery, the open space behind us. I found my community. I found my soul in Martinez. They all had the same values I had. They're going to build on your open space, they're going to build on the beautiful hills, the reason I moved there, they're going to take it, carve it up, take the natural beauty of our community. Don't let this happen. Speak up. Don't let them do this to your community because once it's gone, it's gone forever."

“What we did helped the whole community. I am thoroughly amazed at the energy I had now that I’m so old. I walked the whole town many times. People talked to you, they would take their time and they’d express themselves. It was an amazing experience.”

“I am very proud at what the community accomplished. It was everybody in the community. Everybody who came to the meetings, everybody who came and spoke. It was all of us, it was a team. The whole community voted to tax themselves to pay for the land, to get it onto East Bay Regional Parks.”

Tim Platt, Sherida Bush, and Scott and Katie Williams continue to live in Martinez.

I spoke to Scott as well. He said, “How great. It started so clearly as a neighborhood issue, flyers on telephone poles thing, and now we’ve got a regional park up there.”

Barbara Woodburn eventually moved north to Eureka, near her sons. She passed away in 2019.

In Harriet Burt’s Gazette piece, Tim Platt described Barbara Woodburn as “one of the first citizens to stand up straight against powerful land owners and politicians and to fight for the common man...She had a strong voice, a razor-sharp mind and bulldog tenacity and she used every one of those qualities to save the Franklin Hills and preserve those beautiful lands.”

Enjoy the F Street Trailhead, the Franklin Hills, and Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline.

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