



Rankin Park Loop in March

Round Trip - one half mile
Elevation - 200 foot climb

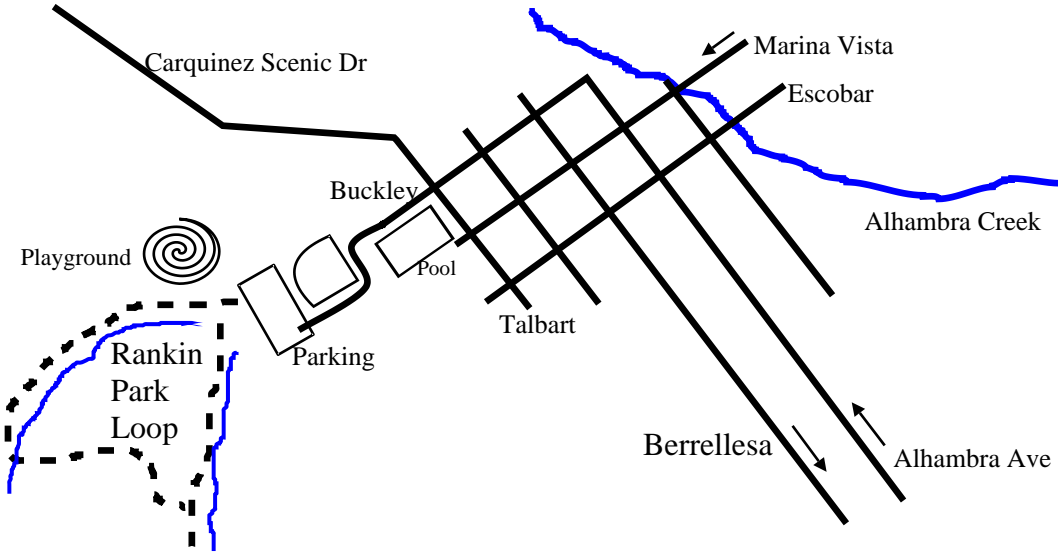
The Alhambra watershed covers 16½ square miles. Franklin Creek, Vaca Creek, and Arroyo Del Hambre Creek drain the upper watershed. These creeks join Alhambra Creek and flow north to the Carquinez Strait. At the lower end of the watershed, just before entering the Strait, the watercourse broadens out into a flood plain. The City of Martinez is built on this flood plain. A person standing next to the creek on Escobar Street can look west and see four city blocks of flat land before the surface of the earth rises up the slope to John Rankin's old olive grove.

One reaches the Rankin Park Loop Trail by traveling west on Escobar Street to Talbart Street, turning right for two blocks, and then left on Buckley Street. After turning left, the traveler passes the Martinez Community pool, opened in 1948. A jog to the left and then to the right takes one around Tavan ball field. From here the road follows an old stone wall, arriving at the parking lot, about 80 feet higher elevation than the flood plain. The trail and the park were originally John Rankin's farm, sold to the city in the late 1930's.

The trail loop passes by the play ground and heads up a gentle slope following a seasonal creek. Just as the trail enters the woods, a road joins the trail coming from a large BBQ area on the left. This is the return loop of the trail.

The little creek flows in winter and spring, seldom in summer. There is not enough flow to create a riparian environment, but it is wetter than the exposed ridge tops. Bay Laurel trees dominate the lower elevation. The trail is fairly straight, then suddenly turns left and crosses the creek. Climbing away from

the creek, the tree canopy decreases, and the land becomes more exposed. After cresting, the trail begins a downward slope. The uphill side of the path is a cut-bank exposed to the sun. Shooting Stars, Buttercups, Manroot, Blue Dicks, Mule Ear, Blue Witch, Monkeyflower Bush and the ever-weedy Yellow Oxalis can all be found blooming here in March.



The monument in the parking lot reads,

California Riding and Hiking Trail

This trail is dedicated as a living memorial to the honored men and women of the armed services who lost their lives in World War II.

Ground Breaking Ceremony Sept 14 1945
Erected at Martinez
By the
Horsemen of Contra Costa County

Forest or Oak Woodland?

On the coastal hills of California, areas covered by trees are usually classified as Forests, where the trees overlap creating dark shade, or as Woodlands where the trees are scattered with open space between. The Rankin Park Loop has some of each.



Blue Witch, a native shrub, is closely related to the Tomato, Potato, White Horsesettle, and Deadly Nightshade

The trail descends to join the downhill road to the BBQ area. Poison Oak, the most common shrub in California, can be found all along the trail, but this area seems particularly infested. Fortunately, the entire Rankin Loop trail is very wide, making it easy to avoid the Poison Oak.

At the beginning and end of the trail, there are the remnants of old stone BBQ pits and picnic areas from earlier times. Historical plaques and mysterious stone-like monuments are numerous, both obvious and hidden. The park has ample evidence of our cultural use of the land. Yet, within a few city blocks of downtown, the Loop Trail still provides an impression of what the land was like before the Europeans arrived.



Poison Oak, *Toxicodendron diversilobum*, is a perennial, usually a shrub, but can also be a vine. It is found on most woodland trails in California. In spring it leafs out in shiny bright green, in summer it becomes dull green, and in the fall some leaves will be bright red. It can easily be avoided by staying on the trails and following the old adage, "Leaves of three, leave them be."