



Season: All Year

Bonelli Park Trail

OTP Hike #230

6-mile loop of Frank G. Bonelli Park

A half-century ago, the Los Angeles Angeles Flood Control District built Puddingstone Dam in the San Jose Hills near San Dimas. Completed in 1928 for the purpose of capturing and storing rainwater and storm runoff, the dam created a 250-acre lake. The new lake soon attracted swimmers and fishermen, and has remained a popular destination for more than 60 years.

As the population of the San Gabriel Valley mushroomed during the 1950s and 1960s, the State Department of Parks and Recreation began purchasing land around the reservoir. Puddingstone Reservoir State Park as it was known, remained a little-developed, low-key place until 1970, when the property was transferred to Los Angeles County.

Today, the park features the aquatic amusement park Raging Waters, a golf course, giant RV campground and a hot tub rental establishment. Plans are in the works for a hotel, cocktail lounge and a second golf course.

The 2,000-acre park, the county's second-largest, has long been the center of controversy between those who want to further develop the park and those who would prefer that the park's hills and canyons remain wild. These conflicting sentiments are even etched onto the lakeside plaque dedicated to former county supervisor and park namesake Frank G. Bonelli. The plaque proclaims that the park is dedicated for "use as a county regional recreation and wilderness area for the enjoyment of all."

As most outdoors enthusiasts know, the words "recreation" and "wilderness" mean different things to different people. For the last decade and a half, the County Parks Department has leaned heavily toward intensive recreation at the park, which is visited by more than two million people each year.

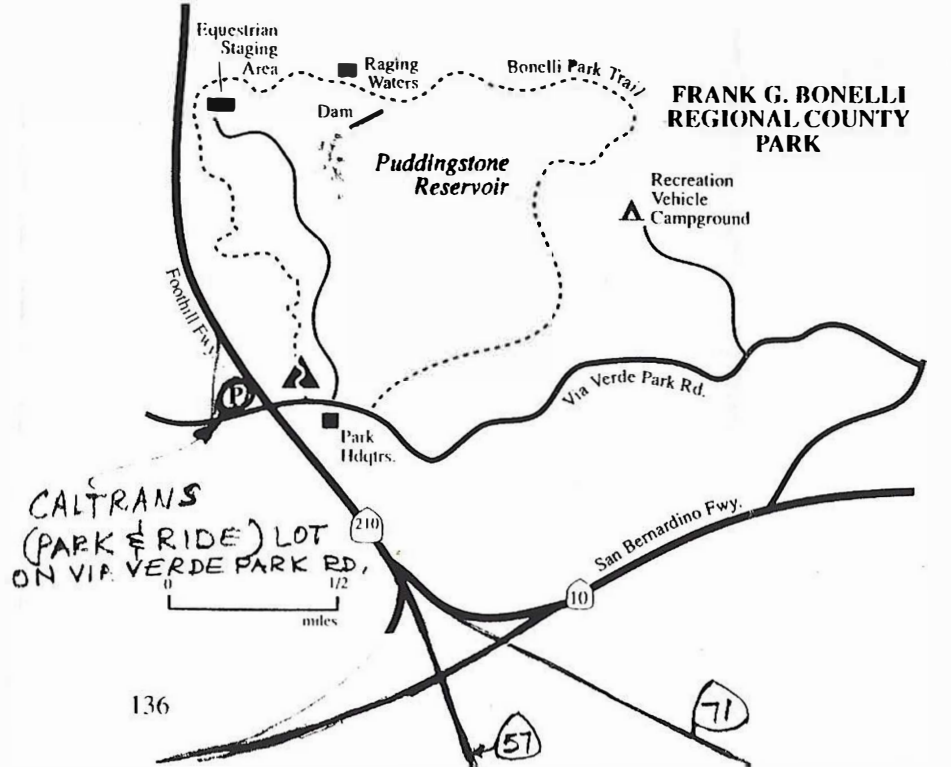
Considering that two of the park's borders are the Foothill and San Bernardino Freeways, and drag boat races are held on Puddingstone Reservoir, Bonelli offers more peace and solitude than one might expect. Fourteen miles of trail cross the park's chaparral-covered hills and lead through quiet canyons shaded by oak and walnut groves. Plantations of pepper, eucalyptus, cedar and pine have been planted in the park. Wildlife includes squirrels, cottontail rabbits, blacktail rabbits, raccoons and deer. About 130 bird species have been sighted in the park.

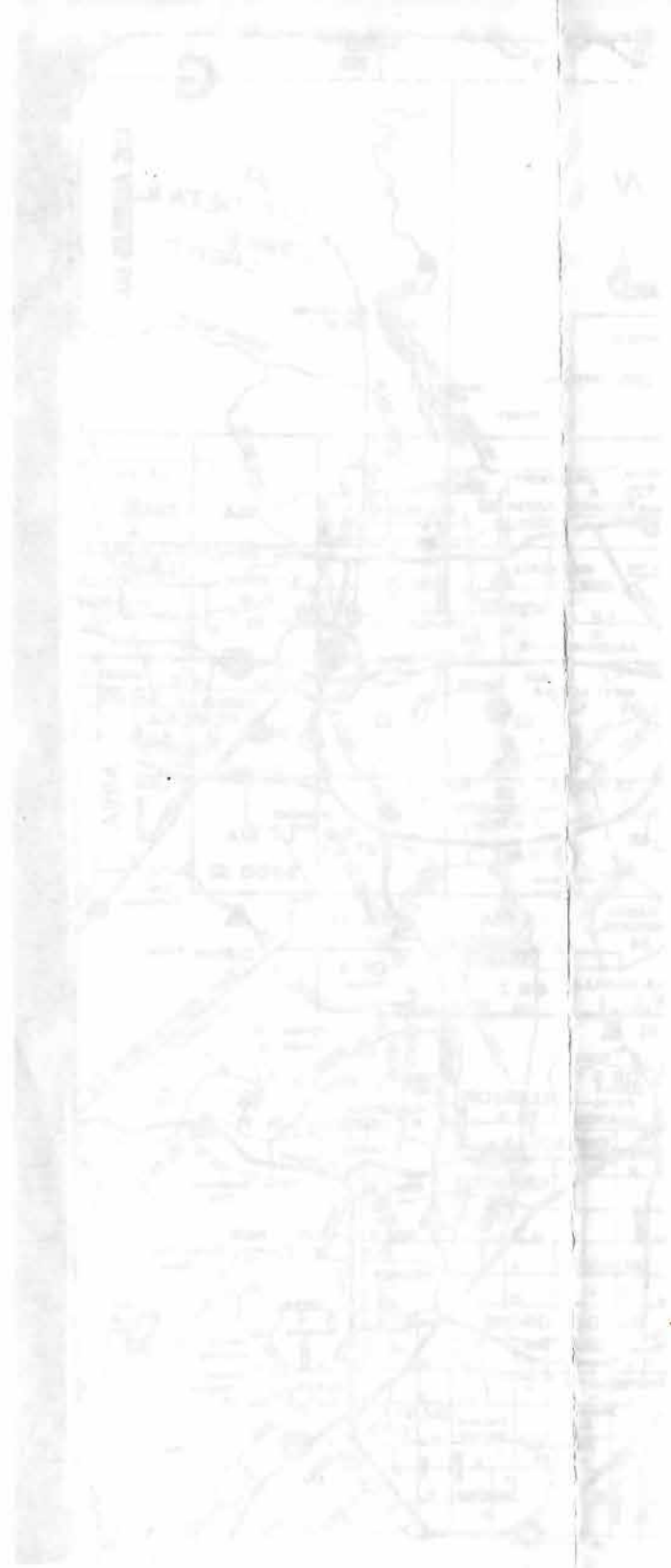
Bonelli's trail system is poorly marked and oriented toward equestrians, not pedestrians. It's the hiker with a sense of direction—and a sense of

humor—who will most enjoy a walk in this park. Trails and trail junctions are rarely signed, but the paths don't stray too far from park roads and landmarks, so you won't get lost. Your best bet for hiking Bonelli is to pick up a park map (out-of-date but it locates major features) from headquarters and improvise your own route.

Directions to trailhead: Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park has two main entrances. (1) Exit the San Bernardino Freeway (10) on Ganesha Boulevard, then turn left (west) on Via Verde Park Road. Continue a couple of miles to park headquarters, where you can pick up an equestrian trails map. You can park in Picnic Valley off Via Verde Park Road, or continue following this road out of Bonelli to the Caltrans parking lot located just west of the Foothill Freeway. (2) Exit the Foothill Freeway (210) on Via Verde Road. Park in the Caltrans lot just west of the freeway. There is no vehicle parking fee; no charge to walk in. No county permit required.

The Hike: From the Caltrans parking lot, cross (with caution) to the south side of Via Verde Road and follow the sidewalk over the freeway overpass into the park. Look right (south) for the path signed "Equestrian Trail." If you want to pick up a park map, you'll continue a short distance farther up Via Verde Road to the headquarters. The trail enters the bougainvillea-draped mouth of the underpass beneath Via Verde. Ever-adaptive mud swallows have affixed their nests to the ceiling of the underpass.





Emerging from the underpass, you'll follow the horse trail into a quieter world. The din of the freeway fades away, and you can hear the call of the birds. Crossing slopes covered with ceanothus, thistle and prickly pear cactus, the trail soon offers its first view of Puddingstone Reservoir. Depending on the day's ozone level, the San Gabriel Mountains rise majestically or murkily before you.

In spring, the hills are green and brightened with mustard and California poppies, but most of the year, they're bare and brown.

The trail descends into a shallow, walnut-shaded canyon, and crosses a (usually dry) creek. Nearing the park's equestrian center, the path emerges from the greenery and reaches a fork located by a thicket of blackberry bushes. The left fork ascends a hillock, dead-ending at an overlook high above Raging Waters. On clear days, this overlook offers a panorama from Mount Baldy to San Bernardino. You'll take the right fork, proceed along a fence line, then switchback up a jimson weed- and monkeyflower-dotted slope to Boater Picnic Area. The trail descends an oak- and pine-shaded draw, passes a fig tree, then joins a fire road that leads near the Raging Waters amusement park.

Crossing Puddingstone Road, near the entrance to Raging Waters, you'll pick up the signed Equestrian Trail, which soon deposits you at a boat-launching area on the north side of the reservoir. Now your improvisation begins in earnest.

Join the paved walkway and head east along the north shore of the reservoir. When the walkway gives out, pick up the unmarked dirt trail that continues east then south along the moist, willow-choked lakeshore. Perched on the hill above you is the park's campground. You'll join a paved bike path and pass several picnic areas.

After passing through well-named Picnic Valley, walk up Eucalyptus Park Road to its junction with Via Verde Park Road. At this point you're just about opposite park headquarters. A right turn and a short walk along Via Verde will return you to the trailhead.