

Sparks April 2023

Historical hikes and events are part of the 9th Annual Hillside Festival. El Cerrito's 100-acre Hillside Natural Area attracts hikers and naturalists throughout the year, but most truly reveals its secrets during the annual free Hillside Fest, put on by El Cerrito Trail Trekkers and the city's Environmental Quality Committee.

In the course of **two days, May 6 and 7**, an intrepid hiker can come away with a truly holistic feeling for the place, its plants, insects, natural communities, geology and history.

We call to your attention events that focus on geological and cultural history, all of which take place on Saturday, and one of which is co-sponsored by The Historical Society. [Download the full schedule and map](#) to trailhead locations.

Both days also feature events keyed to nature, including a bird hike, events for families and children focusing on oak trees and on art, a haiku hike, and much more.

Saturday, May 6:

11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Family-friendly Rockhound Gathering. Learn about the geology of the East Bay Hills by seeing and handling rocks and visiting nearby rock outcrops. Members of the **Northern California Geological Society** will share their knowledge and enthusiasm as we walk to and gather at the Hillside's labyrinth. **Location Five, Schmidt Lane Trailhead.**

w

1 to 3:30 p.m. Geology Walk. Co-sponsored by the **Northern California Geological Society**. Leaders are geologist Gary Prost, Mark Petrofsky, a former teacher and Bill Motzer, a geologist/geochemist. Learn about the geological setting of El Cerrito, rocks, faults and landslides. This moderate to strenuous walk has steep sections. **Location Five, Schmidt Lane Trailhead.**

3:30 to 5 p.m. Edible and Medicinal Plant Walk. Learn about ethnobotany — how native plants have been used for food, medicine, and crafts with Alan Siegel, a docent at Tilden Botanic Garden. Family-friendly uphill walk. You may download the free iNaturalist app to help identify and document what you learn. **Location Five, Schmidt Lane Trailhead.**



Hikers walked up Motorcycle Hill during last year's Historical Tour led by Dave Weinstein, center, at the Hillside Festival. Photo courtesy of El Cerrito Trail Trekkers

5:30 to 7 p.m. Early evening history walk. Learn about the motorcycle hill climbs that in the 1920s attracted thousands of spectators to town, about the origins of the Hillside Natural Area, and about El Cerrito's raucous past as a gambling mecca. Dave Weinstein leads on behalf of the **El Cerrito Historical Society**. **Location one, Motorcycle Hill.**



Tour leader and society board member Tom Panas discussed the early history of our town at the grave of Don Victor Castro, whose adobe and rancho once occupied current El Cerrito's boundary and beyond. Photo by Dave Weinstein

Monuments at Sunset View Cemetery tell personal tales of heroism. The society's longtime board member Tom Panas led an enlightening and often quite personal tour of the cemetery in March, and the society thanks the cemetery and its president, Scott Pennington, for hosting this event. Scott attended the tour.

More than markers of graves, the monuments and gravestones can provide insights into the lives that people within our community led, especially when described by Tom, who has studied local history deeply and has known many of the people about whom he spoke.

After the tour we also heard from one participant, Dan Ringer-Barwick, who brought another story to our attention. He wrote:

“Thanks so much for the tour yesterday. Very fun and informative. The Japanese history was especially interesting. We know a few local people whose families were directly affected during World War II, and to see how it plays out in the graveyard has deep meaning.



A memorial for nurse Helen Crandall, who died at her post while caring for patients during the influenza pandemic in 1918, more than 100 years before the pandemic of Covid-19 hit. Photo courtesy of the El Cerrito Historical Society

“One of the monuments up there that I find most moving these days is the one to Helen Crandall, who, as the plaque says, was ‘a volunteer nurse who died in Berkeley, Calif., at her post during the influenza epidemic of 1918.’

“It has a lot of resonance during the 2020s...It sits there in that ‘royal row, with the [Robert Gordon] Sprouls et al. I’ve attached a picture.”

Dan’s comments hit home for society board member and webmaster John Falconer, who responded:

“Your mention of Helen Crandall struck a chord for me since my maternal grandmother was an RN serving returning servicemen from World War I during the 1918 pandemic. It was through her nursing that she met my mother’s father.”

The Historical Society Board meets the second Thursday of the month at 5 p.m., these days via Zoom. Members are encouraged to attend. Meetings rarely take more than an hour. Occasionally we need to change the date of a meeting. Our next meeting is **May 11, 2023 at 5 p.m.** Topics will include archiving ,digitizing parts of our collection, upcoming events, participation at the July 4 festival, our membership drive, and more.

El Cerrito Historical Society is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Please note we have scheduled the meeting for 15 minutes before the official start time to allow for members to gather in advance of the meeting

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

Time: May 11, 2023 **04:45 PM** Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82712036671?pwd=S3ZwK3ZqT2VJbFBkYVVSNTJlaG5TQT09>

Meeting ID: 827 1203 6671

Passcode: 987653

One tap mobile

+16699006833,,82712036671#,,,*987653# US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 827 1203 6671

Passcode: 987653

The El Cerrito Historical Society produces two publications, the Forge, which is a print publication, which we aim to produce four times a year, and Sparks (from the Anvil), an email publication which we aim to produce monthly. Both hark back to one of El Cerrito's original settlers, William Rust, a blacksmith who worked at his anvil producing, among other things, sparks.

