

THE GRANT PARK PRESS

January-February 2012

Joseph D. Grant County Park

Winter at last

Emily and Maureen Chandler climb into the first storm clouds of our winter.

- Story inside



When the clouds on the previous page passed, they left snow on Mount Hamilton, green on the middle ridges and the valley still in brown.

Winter at last

California's winter is a gift from above.

It descends from heavy clouds as flakes of snow that blanket the Sierra Nevada or melt into raindrops when they reach lower, warmer air. For much of the state, winter is defined less by the drop in temperature than it is by the arrival of clouds at Halloween and their departure before Memorial Day.

Winter turns the land green or white. The rest of the year is the dry season. Brown.

This year our gift was late, arriving last weekend.

Emily, our hiking friend Maureen Chandler and I have been climbing in the Diablo Range that forms the eastern rim of the Santa Clara Valley for the past few weeks to document winter's absence and look for signs that it might be on the way.

Our hiking territory lies within Joseph D. Grant County Park, at 10,000 acres the largest of the 28 parks in the county system. All the pictures in this newsletter were shot in the park, and only the one on the final page gives any hint that this park and its 52 miles of trails are 15-minutes from a million people in the nation's 10th-largest city, San Jose.

– Continued overleaf

Winter at last

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The hikes begin at Grant Lake at 600 feet, the first step up from sea level in the Santa Clara Valley to the summit of 4,367-foot Mount Hamilton – tallest peak in the San Francisco Bay Area – on the park’s eastern edge. Our favorite route climbs through a hidden valley to a ridge at 3,000 feet and covers a bit more than 10 miles roundtrip.



Because these mountains are in the rain shadow of the forested coastal range, they are mostly naked except for scattered oaks.

We’ve seen the bobcats, ground squirrels, red-tailed hawks and golden eagles that live there, spoken to the cattle, heard the wild boar and are on the lookout for mountain lions.

Rattlesnakes are hibernating and the tarantulas only show themselves in October.

It was cold but dry on the ridge in January, the trail hardpan and the grass dry and brown. When we returned Saturday, the threatening weather and muddy trail made us doubt we’d get to the top.

Rancho Cañada de Pala was a Mexican land grant given to José de Jesús de Bernal in 1839. Part of the rancho was acquired by the Grant family of San Francisco in 1880. When Joseph Grant’s fishing buddy, Herbert Hoover, was elected president in 1928, Grant had this cabin built for Hoover as a presidential retreat. Emily, Maureen and I paused at the Pala Seca Cabin for a snack halfway through Saturday’s hike along with Frank from Fremont.

But the clouds were thickest and wettest through the middle section.

As we approached the top, we climbed into the sunshine and decided to keep going the full distance. Our clothes dried as we walked, the wind seemed less bitter and our snack break in the lee of the Pala Seca Cabin was warm.

Winter sunshine is a gift from above, too.

Today's picture pages



**It doesn't take much moisture
to bring green back to the mountains.**





In January, when Emily was up on the ridge, it was cold but dry. The peak behind her and on the left is Mount Hamilton. The small white structures on top are domes for the 10 telescopes of the Lick Observatory. James Lick, piano builder, land baron and patron of the sciences, was reputed to be California's richest man when he died in 1876. Rev. Laurentine Hamilton was a Presbyterian minister and accused heretic.



**Less than an hour ago
we were up in those
clouds.**



The sun sneaks between the clouds and the far ridge.

An aerial photograph of San Jose, California, taken from an elevated position during sunset. The city's lights are visible as a dense pattern of small, warm-toned points of light across the valley floor. The sky above is a gradient of colors, from a deep orange near the horizon to a dark, clear blue at the top. The overall scene is a panoramic view of the city at dusk.

Goodbye from Grant Park

At sunset, San Jose stretches across the floor of the Santa Clara Valley on the descent from Grant Park