

Entry 12

Subject: Huichica Creek Unit of the Napa-Sonoma Marshes State Wildlife Area

My family has a love for walking and hiking in nature that has been passed on to me throughout my life. Now that I've been on this planet for eighteen years, I sometimes feel like I've discovered everything that there is to see in Napa and rejoice whenever I find something new.

One day, a few years back, my father and I took a drive on Milton Road out at the Carneros. While we were passing several funky-looking, cabin-like houses, we noticed a spot off to the side of the road, to the right, where there were a few cars parked. We also saw something that looked like it might be a trail, but had a hard time believing it would be anything much. We decided to park our car and go see what was there. At the start of the trail, we saw a sign that said it was part of the Huichica Creek Unit of the Napa-Sonoma Marshes State Wildlife Area. There isn't a specific address listed online for the wildlife refuge since it's in such a remote location. Here are directions based upon how my father and I found it:

- From Highway 12 West, take the first left after passing Stanley Lane onto Cuttings Wharf Road
- Stay straight when Cuttings Wharf Road becomes Las Amigas Road
- Stay straight when Las Amigas Road becomes Milton Road
- Pass over railroad tracks, then drive for approximately another mile
- Park across the street from mailbox #1794. A yellow gate to the right marks the entrance.

After we passed through the gate, we kept walking for a short bit until our eyes came across the last thing we ever expected to see on such an off-the-beaten-path: a gorgeous pond with serene water and stunning wildlife left and right that included ice plants with pink flowers, hawks, and egrets. It was breathtaking due to how vastly expansive it was and its different options of trails to choose from.

Ever since that day, I've come back here more than any other walking/hiking location in Napa. Even though I love Westwood Hills Park, Timberhill Park, and all the other well known spots, I've been to them so many times that they don't evoke the same excitement out of me as one of the most beautiful marsh areas I've ever laid my eyes on. Since that first experience, I've taken my mother, best friend, and grandmother there, including just a few weeks after my grandfather passed away. Looking out at that expansive view with my grandmother was nourishing as we rested on a bench looking out at the pond. I thought about what my grandfather would have thought of the place if he were still alive.

I feel this landmark is of great value to Napa County since it provides people a unique opportunity to get off screens and genuinely connect with family and friends through face to face conversation in a stunning outdoor spot that's unlike any other place in Napa. There also aren't many areas for animals to exist peacefully in our valley without human-made

interruptions. This marsh area is a perfect chance for them to live in their natural habitat and thrive.