



Hit the Trail - Take a Hike!

How do you want to start your next journey?

Do you want a jolt? A jump start to your adventure? Do you want to get your heart pumping and make this one serve as a workout in nature? Or would you rather ease into your exploration, your meeting with mother nature?

Helen Putnam Regional Park in Petaluma offers both opportunities. If you enter it into your GPS, you'll end up at the paved parking lot off of Chileno Valley Road on the southwest side of town. You pay \$7 to park, and can make use of the shady picnic area, children's playground, drinking fountains and restrooms. Here you can leisurely plan your day and launch your hike. As you set out on the trail, you have multiple options for the type of experience you'd prefer. Select your route and follow the signs to guide your journey to and fro, or perhaps you'll decide to extend your pedestrian travel once you discover all the various alternatives and beautiful sights this protected wilderness has to offer. No matter which path you choose, your canine

companion is welcome here (on leash) and sure to have plenty of enticing scents to take in along the way.

If you want that quick start and don't need a potty or water station, seek out the "secret" park entrance in the bordering residential neighborhood on Oxford Court. Please be respectful of those who live along this street, however, by parking only where designated, and be sure to clean up after "Fido and Fifi." Click here for [maps](#). You'll begin with a steep paved path that might get even the experienced hiker breathing loudly, but the burn is rewarding and short-lived as you find different trails to take you through the beautiful oak groves or keep you climbing to the top for a panoramic view of the town across to Sonoma Mountain on one side, and the rural rolling hills and valleys toward the coast on the other. When the grass is green, you may even hear "The Sound of Music" as you stop in amazement.

Not to be missed, is the iconic oak tree bent with time that stands alone, complete with a fairytale hole in its textured trunk. You might get the chance to observe the turkey vultures riding the thermals over the clearing or see lizards scamper off into the bushes. This wondrous place lets you forget about your everyday stresses and frees you from the doldrums. Strike out on your own for an experience that changes with each visit; invite a loved one to join you. Or make the trek with your favorite furry friend because Helen Putnam is **so** worth skipping the dog park.