

Coal Mine Ridge

Coal Mine Ridge rests at the eastern foot of the Coast Range, with nearly all of the developed area of Portola Valley on the NE side. The deep canyon of Corte Madera Creek forms the SW side and curves around the nose of the ridge. Much of the ridge lies within the Portola Valley Ranch and Blue Oaks properties and the 400 acre ridge is, in itself, a complete wildlife habitat. A large portion of the Ridge is dedicated open space with trail easements that run through it. Trails that traverse or follow the ridge are Toyon Trail, Old Spanish Trail, Coalmine Trail, Arroyo Trail, Blue Oak Trail, Lake Trail and Sunrise Trail. For usage restrictions on these trails, see the map of Portola Valley Ranch/Blue Oaks Trails.

We are trying to preserve the plants and wildlife on the ridge for the enjoyment of future generations, so do not remove plants or flowers. Equestrians should watch for trail closures during wet weather.

Building of Toyon Trail

A prime example of how volunteer spirit built the town is the story of the trail system. Planning for trails began even as the town was incorporated in 1964 and ever since, countless unsung volunteers have devoted hours to create and maintain them.

The initial layout for a new trail required expert, if volunteer, work. Herb Dengler hacked through two miles of tough underbrush to lay out Toyon Trail on Coal Mine Ridge. Only then could the actual building of the trail begin, and then dozens of volunteers turned out with gloves and tools. Announcements seeking workers for the Toyon Trail offered choices: light pruning, heavy chainsaw work, hoeing or swinging a pickaxe. Work began at 7:30 AM on every second Saturday and continued for 44 workdays over the course of three years.

What backbreaking work it was, and what a spirit of camaraderie and community spirit it created. The mayor Bob Brown paid tribute to the more than 100 indomitable volunteers in January of 1981: "This trail, through beautiful woods with spectacular vistas of the Coast Range, will be a lasting monument to those who have blazed, picked and shoveled, and is an outstanding example of why Portola Valley is indeed a very unique community."

Old Spanish Trail

The Old Spanish Trail winds up Coal Mine Ridge from the intersection of Willowbrook and Alpine Roads, follows the crest of the ridge and dips down to end at Los Trancos Road.

The first record of the trail is an 1823 account of Spanish soldiers pursuing Pomponio, an escaped mission Indian who was on a crime rampage. Historians believe the soldiers rode up the Old Spanish Trail to his hideout in a deep, rocky gorge west of Skyline. In the 1830s Antonino Buelna refined the old Indian trail to make a road between the two ranchos he acquired from the Mexican governor, one of which became the heart of the Stanford campus, with the other being near the Pacific coast. He used the road to transport hides and tallow from his coast ranch to ships waiting in the calm waters of San Francisco Bay. This road is credited as the first to cross the outer coastal range.

In 1855 the famous Dr. Tripp of the now handsomely restored Woodside Store sent supplies by mule train over the trail to the new store in Pescadero. That same year a low-grade coal mine opened on the ridge, hence the name Coal Mine Ridge. (A massive landslide in 1890 buried the mine, which never produced high quality coal.)

In 1863 Josiah Whitney's Geodetic Survey marked the trail on its official map and reported "only two trails over the mountains, one from Pescadero over to the Corte Madera ranch (Portola Valley) and one between Santa Cruz and the Santa Clara Valley." Gradually other roads began twisting up to the Skyline.

Several times plans have been laid to use the gentle grade of the Old Spanish Trail for a major new road over the mountains. Even in the 1960s talk of a road to connect Portola Valley to Skyline via Old Spanish was begun. However, these plans came to naught and today you can walk or ride a horse on a long portion of the trail as it wends its way through lands of the Portola Valley Ranch and the Blue Oaks development.

Excerpted from "The Old Spanish Trail" in *The Portola Valley Primer*