

A Day at Briones Regional Park

By Sophie Braccini



Severin Borenstein with dog Wilbur taking a walk Photos by Sophie Braccini

The pleasure of going to Briones Regional Park starts on Happy Valley road in Lafayette. On the narrow winding road, where the speed limit is 30 mph, the sight of beautiful homes and large planted gardens is the perfect introduction to the nature one is about to experience. The ride is only about 12 minutes from downtown Lafayette and you'll need \$5 for parking in the Bear Creek staging area, one of five that the park offers.

Briones is a 6,000 acre regional park with magnificent vistas of rolling hills, cool shady canyons and miles of hiking trails. The wild life at Briones is incredibly diverse with assorted birds, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates making up the local population. Mountain lions have been spotted at Briones and encounters with rattlesnakes are not infrequent.

For Tutu Sharon of Lafayette and her family, Briones is their absolute favorite park. They come often with the children for barbecues and picnics in the shade of the ancient oak trees. For this day, they've chosen a picnic spot by the nearby creek. They like to go down to the creek and then hike up the hill to be in the middle of a deep forest. Sharon's daughter, Kimberley's only regret is that the park is not open for overnight individual camping. She comes during the week as well with her dog and loves the incredible scenic views the park offers.

For Marc Tausig, Rebecca Szatmari and Al Kress, Briones is a different story. The 2 men are archers and Briones contains one of the few archery ranges in the East Bay. Approximately 45 acres of archery range are set out like a golf course. There, you move from target to target until you have completed the course. The targets are made of foam to look like wild life in their natural surroundings. The local Archery Club has about 65 members of all ages. Barbara, Marc and Al spend a big part of their Sunday at the park enjoying archery, hiking and the natural surroundings. While Rebecca doesn't shoot arrows, she loves the freedom of being outdoors.

She looks for wild life and often spots rattlesnakes, bluebelly lizards, and other interesting wildlife.

For many local residents, Briones is a favorite place to have fun with their dogs. Severin and Margaret Borenstein often take their Portuguese Water Dog Wilbur, for long



Tutu Sharon, grand daughter Cassie, daughter Kimberley, grand son Aaron (sitten), grand son Tyler and foreign student Deiane from Spin (standing), having a great afternoon under the trees.

walks at Briones. As soon as they turn onto Bear Creek Road, the dog knows where he's going and starts to get excited. "The nature is magnificent here," says Borenstein, a professor at UC Berkeley. "You choose from miles of trails, in the shade or in the sun, whatever strikes your mood." The Borenstein's have an annual pass for parking and have been coming to Briones for 15 years. One small complaint from Severin: since the park is open to ranchers who rent space for cattle grazing, so dogs sometimes encounter cow manure, for which they seem to have an enduring and annoying attraction!

The endless trails of Briones are a perfect place for hikers, bicyclists and horses. It has a long history of human activities. In the first half of the nineteen century the 13,000 plus acre of park land belonged to ranchers Felipe and Maria Briones. It was purchased around 1870 by Elias Blum. Like many large pieces of land surrounding the public creeks and reservoirs, it was purchased by the People's Water Company starting in 1906. In 1957 the East Bay Municipal Utility District, successor to the water company, and Contra Costa County started calling this large open space "Briones." Since 1966, 6,117 acres of parkland have been transferred to East Bay Regional Parks District. Briones Regional Park officially opened on October 22 1967.

The park offers many first-come, first-served picnic spots with barbecues. It also has two larger, group picnic areas that can be reserved at the Bear Creek Staging Area at Oak Grove, which can accommodate 50 people, and the picnic grounds at Newt Hollow, which accommodate 150. Briones offers three group camping areas--Wee-Ta-Chi, Maud Whalen, and Homestead Valley. They may be reserved by calling 1-888-EBPARKS or 1-888-327-2757, press option 2, then 1, or by writing to EBRPD Reservations, 2950 Peralta Oaks Court, P.O. Box 5381, Oakland, CA 94605-0381. Reservations must be made at least 7 days in advance.



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