

Boy Scouts of America



Historic Trail

ALMADEN QUICKSILVER

Troop 466
Sunnyvale, California
Santa Clara County Council
Polaris District

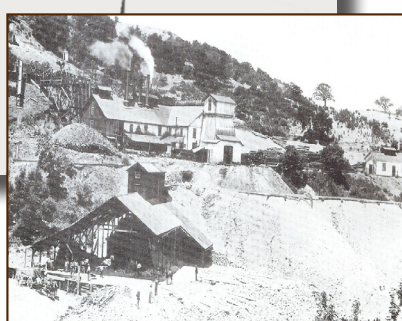
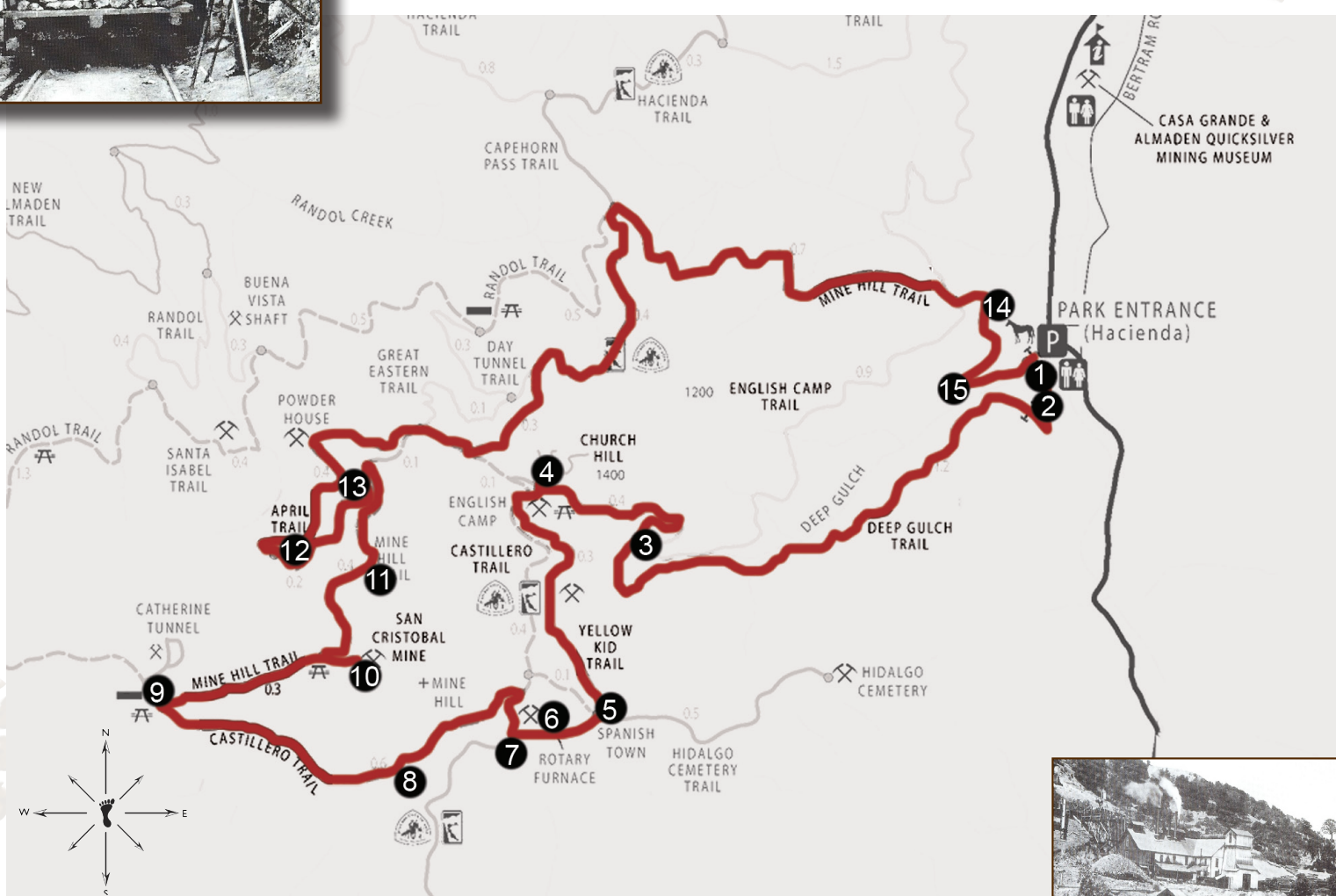


Thanks are also due to the scout and adult volunteers who helped to install the posts now visible all along the trail.

Senior Ranger William Burr
Assistant Scoutmaster Michael S. Malone
Park Interpreter John Slenker
Park Interpreter Mary Berger
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This trail's markings and information were created as an Eagle project by the Boy Scouts of Troop 466. This guided tour is intended to provide an introduction to the history of the New Almaden Quicksilver mining operation for the scouts and public of the Santa Clara County. Thanks are due to the following individuals without whom this project could not have been completed:

A HISTORIC EAGLE PROJECT



The Historic Trail

Point 1 is located at the south end of the Hacienda entrance parking lot.

1. ENTRANCE

Welcome to the Almaden Quicksilver Historic Trail. The area that is now the Almaden Quicksilver County Park was once the second largest Mercury (“quicksilver”) producing mine in the world. This area was a busy mining center for more than 125 years, from as early as 1845 until 1976. Even before that, this area was used by local Ohlone Indians as a source of the deep red mercury-bearing rock, cinnabar. During its mining era, the seven New Almaden mines produced nearly 84 million pounds of the valuable liquid metal – used for everything from explosives during the Civil War to silvery Victorian glass and, in the 20th century, battery cells and thermometers.

Enter the park and walk to post 2, located in front of the fenced-off portion of the Reduction Works.

2. REDUCTION WORKS

This yard, at the former site of the Hacienda Reduction Works, contains a collection of equipment from the New Almaden Mine and the Guadalupe Mine. One item of particular interest is an old wooden Cornish pump from an English design which was used to pump water out of the mine shafts. Another unusual item, a cylindrical piece of machinery, was a small rotary furnace used for extracting Mercury from crushed cinnabar ore.

Continue hiking through the field, then turn sharply to the right near the rock outcropping and enter the Deep Gulch Trail. Post number 3 is approximately 1 mile up this trail. Be sure to watch out for poison oak as it has a tendency to encroach on this path.

3. HARRY SHAFT

These rock piles are the tailings of the Harry Shaft, named after Captain James Harry. This is one of more than 100 mine entrances in the park. In mining terms a “tunnel” refers to a horizontal mine entrance while a “shaft” refers to a vertical mine entrance. These numerous entrances only hint at the many miles of tunnels snaking deep under the surface of this hill.

Continue up Deep Gulch Trail until it meets with English Camp Trail. Take a left. You will hike into English Camp, recognizable by a clearing with several buildings, picnic tables, and a flagpole. Continue straight for a short distance and turn right onto the short side trail called “Church Hill Road.” Post 4 is located slightly off to the right of this path.

4. ENGLISH CAMP

English Camp was developed for Cornish and other English-speaking miners to live, alone or with their families. Single miners typically lived in one of the local boardinghouses while married miners lived with their families in one of the dozens of houses on the hill surrounding the town. Rent was extremely affordable on the hill: \$5-\$10 per month for a house and grounds, or, if you wanted to pitch a tent or build a cabin, just the grounds for as little as \$10 per year. Post 4 points toward the former location of the company store from which miners could purchase a wide range of staple items using either cash or payroll-based credits called *boletos*.

Walk back into English Camp. Feel free to look around. Then hike up the Castillero Trail, to the left of the CCC flagpost, briefly, until you reach the Yellow Kid Trail on the left. Take this trail and read its interpretive signs. Post 5 is located just to the right (uphill) from where the Yellow Kid Trail intersects with the Hidalgo trail.

5. SPANISH TOWN

Spanish town, located on the steep incline before you, housed as many as 1,500 Mexicans and Chileans, mostly single men. To the right, up on the hill and beneath the tall cypress trees, is the unmarked site of the Guadalupe Cemetery, where the people of Spanish Town buried their dead.

Continue straight on the Yellow Kid Trail. Post 6 is to the right of the trail right before you reach the large structure.

6. ROTARY FURNACE

This large rotary furnace formed an important part of the reduction process of mercury from its ore. The large pipe in the front rotated slowly while heating cinnabar, breaking down the mercury sulfide and turning mercury into its gaseous form. This highly toxic gas would then pass through the massive radiator-like condensers on the left (You will see these better as you continue up the path to the left of the furnace). The end product of this condensation would be liquid mercury, ready to be poured into flasks and shipped around the world.

Continue down the path you are on. Post 7 is located in front of the curved tree, to the left of the path.

7. HANGING TREE

Justice was quick at the Almaden Quicksilver mines. This rather ominous-looking tree was once, in the 19th century, the site of a hanging. Though the nature of the crime itself has been lost to history, descendants of those who witnessed the event still throw stones at the tree in symbolic contempt for the despicable crime.

Double back to the intersection and take a left. At the intersection at the top of this little hill take another left, heading northwest on Castillero Trail. Post 8 is on the left of the path.

8. UMUNHUM AND LOMA PRIETA

From this viewpoint you can see two of the Bay Area’s best-known peaks. Mt Loma Prieta is the peak on the left with the many communication towers. Mt. Umunhum can be easily identified on your right by the huge cubical building near its summit, long visible to South Bay residents. Mt. Loma Prieta and Mt. Umunhum are, respectively, the tallest and second tallest peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Mt. Umunhum (an Indian name, meaning “Hummingbird Resting Place”) served as a U.S. military early warning radar station from 1958 to 1980. Mt Loma Prieta (“Black Mountain”) is most famous as being near the epicenter of the devastating 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake.

Continue hiking on this path. Post 9 is located at Bull Run, the intersection of Castillero Trail and Mine Hill Trail, identifiable by a horse water trough and lunch tables.

9. BULL RUN

Bull Run is the intersection of Mine Hill Trail and Castillero Trail. Although the thick brush makes it is hard to visualize, this site was once a flat field, filled with wild flowers, and used by the miners on holidays for picnics, baseball games and celebrations.

Take a right onto Mine Hill Road, heading east and downhill. Take the first right, a small offshoot that leads to San Cristobal mine.

10. SAN CRISTOBAL

San Cristobal is the only tunnel in the park which visitors can enter for any distance. The large cube of granite to the right of this mine entrance was brought, like many others like it, to Mine Hill from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to be used in mining competitions. In these rivalries, a single miner or a team of two, would be timed drilling an iron spike into the rock. You can still see their work. The miners would compete in this way on special occasions both for bragging rights and prizes. Because of the consistent hardness of this kind of rock, it was possible to compare times and drill depths with miners at other locations throughout the state.

Enter the portal into San Cristobal then double back onto Mine Hill road. Take a right and continue heading East on Mine Hill. Post 11 is on the right of trail in a clearing.

11. VIEW OF SAN JOSE

If you are facing Post 11, turn around. Before you is a spectacular view of the skyscrapers and sprawling buildings that make up San Jose and Silicon Valley (The post was placed on this side of the trail because of potential erosion in this area). The view before you has changed dramatically since 1845. Then, San Jose was little more than a small pueblo, with a thriving Mission Santa Clara

just up the road, surrounded by endless grass meadows and immense Live Oak trees. If you had returned to this viewpoint in 1920, you would have seen the Valley of Heart’s Delight, with a bustling downtown San Jose at the center of unbroken miles of fruit trees – a spectacular sight, especially when in blossom. Since then, San Jose has grown to become the 10th largest city in the United States, with a population approaching a million people and the capital city of the world-famous heartland of the electronics revolution, Silicon Valley.

Continue hiking down Mine Hill Road. Soon you will take a sharp left onto the April Trail

12. POWDER HOUSE

This brick building was a store house for the dynamite and other explosives that were used to dig the deep tunnels and shafts of the mines on the hill. Right behind the Powder House is the former location of the Victoria Shafthouse. This powder house is a reconstruction of the original, which was destroyed in 1989 by a shockwave from the Loma Prieta earthquake. The building’s unusual design, preserved in this reconstruction, featured manure insulation between dual layers of brick. This was both to keep the dynamite cool so that it wouldn’t ‘sweat’ nitroglycerine and become much more dangerous – and to channel the blast in case those measures failed . . .

Continue hiking down the April Trail. Post 13 is at the bottom of the April Tunnel entrance.

13. APRIL TUNNEL TRESTLE

Beneath this large structure, ore cars would dump quality ore into a wagon, or later a dump truck, to be taken to the Hacienda Reduction Works for processing. Worthless “slag” rocks, as you can see, were simply dumped off the far edge of the trestle.

Continue on and up the April Trail. Take a slight left at Mine Hill Road, and stay on it for the rest of the hike. Post 14 is to the left of the path.

14. CHIMNEY

This immense chimney is officially designated the “Almaden Quicksilver Chimney.” It was used to release dangerous sulfuric gases from the Hacienda reduction works high into the air, where (with luck) the wind would carry it away. An unfortunate consequence to all of this sulfuric acid being released into the air was years of acid rain falling on this part of the South Bay.

Continue on Mine Hill Road. Post 15 is located to the right of the trail.

15. TRAMWAY

The tramway that brought ore down from mine hill to the Hacienda Reduction works passed through this gulch. Ore cars were brought to the top of the hill by the weight of the loaded ore cars traveling down. The rails and the last oar car were removed in the 1940s after several youths were killed attempting the ride without brakes.

Continue on Mine Hill Road until you meet the Hacienda entrance parking lot. Driving, take a left at Almaden Rd. and take a sharp right into the Casa Grande to visit the New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum. Here you can fill out your quiz and earn your historic trail medal and/or Boy Scout patch.

NEW ALMADEN

The town of New Almaden was built to support the housing needs of the New Almaden Quicksilver mine. This area is now a historic district, with zoning regulations that allow and require residents to keep the historical character of their homes. Many interpretive signs are posted along this stretch of road, to educate visitors about the history of several of these homes.

CASA GRANDE

The Casa Grande was the largest house in the town of New Almaden. It was built in 1854, and quickly became the de facto home for the mine manager. The Casa Grande has, over the past 150 years, served many different purposes, including acting as the home for an Opry House, and most recently as the home of the New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum.