

Creekside Walks in Berkeley, Albany, and El Cerrito

This is a work in progress – check back for improvements, including map and illustrations!

Being outdoors in nature boosts our health and joy – and there's something special about walking along a stream. The water is full of life, yet peaceful. Shaded creek canyons are cool refuges on hot days – and for kids, wonderlands, playgrounds, and outdoor schoolrooms. (See our [Nature Treasure Hunt](#) for families.)

East Bay cities, though, most creeks are buried in pipes, visible in fragments often hidden in back yards. Here are some nearby easy strolls you can take along creeks in Friends of Five Creeks' area. When you go, please respect plants and animals. Water in our local creeks is generally clean, but a sewer line could break at any time. Wash your hands after touching the water.

Strawberry Creek on the UC Berkeley campus: Strawberry Creek is a main reason why both Berkeley and UC Berkeley are here. Short stretches are visible high upstream in the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden and downstream at Strawberry Creek Park.

For an extended walk, explore UC Berkeley's historic campus, originally planned around the creek's forks. Entering just south of the main entrance circle on Oxford, you can follow the main stem to its forks in the Grinnell Nature Area and Eucalyptus Grove. A loop can follow the shady south fork upstream beyond Faculty Glade, then cut across campus to pick up the creek north of the libraries, following it back down through sunnier meadows. Background and maps are [here](#). For two shorter guides, try this [handout, focused on architecture](#), or [Wholly H2O's cell phone tour](#).

Upper Codornices Creek branches in the steep hills, with hidden waterfalls you can explore with the [Berkeley Path Wanderers' excellent map of paths](#). Two forks join in Codornices Park, across from the Berkeley Rose Garden. From the meadow in Codornices Park, the south fork can be followed upstream from the first picnic table, up into shady woods past more picnic areas, bridges and rustic trails.

Downstream at Live Oak Park, you can follow the creek from Oxford Street at Berryman Path to Shattuck Avenue, with trails on both banks most of the way. Live Oak was Berkeley's first "nature park." The beautiful stonework from Walnut to Shattuck was built before World War I. Another glimpse of the creek comes at the Ohlone Greenway north of Gilman, on the Berkeley-Albany border. The observation railing here, built by Friends of Five Creeks, features quail – "Codornices" means "quail" in Spanish.

Lower Codornices Creek: Below San Pablo Avenue, you can follow Codornices Creek west on the Berkeley-Albany border for almost a half mile, to the transcontinental follow Codornices for a little under a half mile mostly on paved, level trail, from San Pablo Avenue to the transcontinental railroad tracks. This urban oasis has little resemblance to the creek that petered out in wet grasslands before filtering to a salt marsh and slough, or the urban industrial area it became. Each block has a different "backstory" and a different look, but the trail along the naturalized channel is well worth exploring. Volunteers have worked to restore this area since 1994 and are responsible for much of what you see. Some [background is here](#). Please [stay](#) out of the water to protect the small, struggling population of threatened steelhead trout.

Cerrito Creek: This What we call Cerrito Creek is better thought of as a fan of small creeks that came together in a fertile wetland west of today's San Pablo Avenue, ringed by Native American settlements. The main stem, with a deep canyon in the hills upstream, became the division between huge Spanish and Mexican land grants, and after the US takeover, the Alameda/Contra Costa County border and thus divisions between Berkeley and Albany, on the south, and Kensington, El Cerrito, and Richmond, on the north.

Downstream from today's Ohlone Greenway at the south edge of El Cerrito Plaza, you can follow a naturalized creek west to Evelyn Avenue. Dense willows along the ramp down from the Greenway show that this reach was recently restored as a requirement for building adjacent apartments. A block downstream, the creek pops up again, in a channel re-constructed with a state grant in 2003-4. Volunteers tended it for many years, making it the mature, shady oasis that edges El Cerrito Plaza from Talbot to Kains. El Cerrito's general plan and zoning require that the intervening stretches be "daylighted" if the businesses and parking lots between them are redeveloped.

West of San Pablo Avenue, Cerrito flows aboveground to Pierce Street, edging the I-580 freeway – the Bay shore before Europeans came. The short trail on the south, Albany, bank is a training walkway for the state's school for recently blinded adults, which owns the creek here.

On the north, El Cerrito bank, a creekside trail begins at the flowery end to the stub of Adams Street and continues down to Pierce. Pipes below the overlook swell the flow from several now-buried creeklets. A narrow, shaded walk overlooking the water opens to El Cerrito's grassy Creekside Park. At low flows, you can scramble down to a willow trunk and cross to the meadow in Albany's Creekside Park. Farther downstream, low vertical banks and a grassy flood plain show that tides rise and fall here, even though fill has moved the shoreline west. At Pierce, you can walk east again along the creek back to the meadow. From here you can cross back to El Cerrito, continue on a rustic trail past Native American mortar rocks and a willow grove marked on our oldest maps, or take a switchback trail to the top of Albany Hill.

Cerrito's straight, narrow channel pushed against Albany Hill was left when El Cerrito the Richmond filled the former marsh. As a result, the neighborhood is now a FEMA flood zone. The varied native vegetation all along this channel is largely the result of volunteer efforts. [Background is here.](#)

Baxter Creek: This many-branched little creek with [a fascinating history](#) has been restored in El Cerrito's Gateway Park (11970 San Pablo Ave., across from Home Depot). Citizen effort kept this from becoming a parking lot! You can follow the creek upstream along the Ohlone Greenway to Conlon, at an overlook with benches with a wildflower area just to the south. A block east on Conlon, El Cerrito's Canyon Trail Park welcomes you with a reedy frog pond and protected rock with Native American petroglyphs. (Citizen efforts transformed what had been a bare concrete flood-control pond and a children's sand box.) You can continue upstream on a wide main trail or rustic creekside one, to playing fields. Here, an easy trail continues upstream past a beautiful frog pond created by citizen volunteers, a shady canyon, and playing fields. The total distance is just under a half mile. A longer walk on attractive residential streets leads to other bits of Baxter Creek, in El Cerrito's Poinsett Park and Richmond's Mira Vista Park.