



The Lobos Creek nature boardwalk starts at Lincoln and Gibson Streets but the trail to Baker Beach begins at 15th Avenue and Lake.

A Walk in the Presidio

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Even in a weather-challenged place like San Francisco, each season brings something different to the mix. In spring, the smell of the blossoms, whether you see them or not, lures you ever farther out of doors, especially when the temperature starts creeping upward.

It's not a long trip, either, until you reach that mystical place where concrete stops and the natural world begins. Whether there's sunlight or a fog, you have your very own national park waiting for you on the northwest side of town.

There the Presidio sits, overlooking the Golden Gate, like a protective older brother. Incred-

ibly, some people have lived here for years and barely set foot within its rustic borders.

The Presidio is not like other national parks. In most other places, you have to make reservations six months in advance, pay lots of money, travel there in the dead of night to avoid traffic, and still get stuck behind an RV for the last ten miles of winding road.

Here, on the other hand, you can crawl out of bed at noon and pull up curbside to almost any trailhead by 12:10. The high cost of living in San Francisco is not without its perks.

We're also talking federal property, so parking meters are unheard of. And if that doesn't have you salivating, you can unleash Fido and let him plunge into the woods without a second thought. While it's not technically legal to do that, since the rang-

ers stick pretty much to patrolling the roadways, the chances of you and your pup being taken into custody are remote.

Here's another little secret: one of the entrances into the Presidio that most tourists don't know about is at 15th Avenue and Lake, in the Richmond district. This intersection is a couple blocks west of Park Presidio Drive (which is 19th Avenue on the south side of Golden Gate Park).

The Lobos Creek Trail not only provides a salve for your canine's living room doldrums, it will immediately relax taut muscles and seep adrenalin into your downtown trodden soul. For your pleasure, you'll find a pine forest, coastal dune scrub, woodpeckers, owls, and an occasional raptor overhead as you trek your way to the edge of the continent - Baker Beach.

Entering the grounds at 15th and Lake, you'll veer left pass the old public hospital and head to the back of the long parking lot on the west side. That's where the trail starts.

First built and occupied as a fort by the Mexican army, the Presidio transformed into a U.S. army base after California became a state. During the Clinton Administration, the grounds were handed over to the National Park Service as part of legislation crafted by Congressman Phillip Burton in 1978. It has not been a seamless transition, however, and an entity called the Presidio Trust was formed in order to sell off vast tracts of acreage to developers and private companies.

On the bright side, not all the new tenants are speculative investment bankers, icky warehouses and rich foreigners with vacation homes. George Lucas's famous Industrial Light and Sound company occupies new

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buildings located a few blocks south of the Palace of Fine Arts.

From a horticulture perspective, it's always interesting to see what grows in sandy soil near the ocean. As you navigate the trail north from the back of the hospital lot, you'll see a lot of strange native vegetation to your left, where there's a gulch that transfers runoff out to sea. On the less bright side, a spreading grove of eucalyptus trees is threatening the pine trees and other native foliage on the slope rising above a nature trail.

Speaking of which, you'll spot the little boardwalk to the west about a hundred yards into your journey. Made of wooden planks, the walk wraps its way north to the lot of the Presidio Trust Operations building on Lincoln Street. (The boardwalk is accessible by wheelchair, but not from 15th Avenue and Lake. The entrance is at the back of the Operations building lot at Lincoln and Gibson.)

Back on the dirt trail, you have the choice of descending a short staircase that meets the nature walk, or you can continue to strike northward. Either way, you'll see plenty of coastal buckwheat and other botanical oddities that call to mind a moon landscape.

In case you're wondering, Lincoln Boulevard is less than half a mile from where the trailhead begins. Crossing the road, Baker Beach is just a few more paces



This road leads out to the parking lot alongside the picnic grounds at Baker Beach.



Don't you wish every Muni route could look like the 29-Sunset?

northward, accessible either by the trail, or simply by walking along Gibson. You'll pass a bus stop for the 29 bus, which passes through here on its way back from the Golden Gate Bridge.

Yes, the 'ol 29-Sunset, with one of the worst on-time records in the Muni system. And it's no wonder, since it traverses the most scenic route in the city. It's simply hard to drive fast through the Presidio.

Of course, Baker Beach is not a bad place to linger, with its stunning view of the Golden Gate Bridge nearby. Although the ocean is too dangerous to swim in, dogs love chasing driftwood into the foam - that is, when they're not chasing each other up and down the beach. Naturally, you don't want to throw your stick too far into the surf...

A little inland from the sand, picnic tables are tucked into sheltered spots along a woody countryside, equipped with clean restrooms, barbecue pits and running water.

Again, all of this costs nothing and you don't need to make a reservation to enjoy it.

Because of its proximity to public transportation, one could only wish the old hospital at 15th and Lake might be converted into transitional housing for some of

the city's homeless residents. It's an ideal location for sick bodies and minds to recover, and there are plenty of park maintenance and habitat restoration projects to help them earn their keep.

For more information about the Trust's future plans, visit their website at presidiotrust.gov. National Park Service rangers conduct free hikes through different parts of the Presidio on a regular basis. More about that is listed on their website at nps.gov/prsf. Select "Events Calendar" under Quicklinks.

To reach the 15th Ave. and Lake entrance to the park, bus riders can hop off the 28 or 1 bus at Park Presidio and California, walk a block west, then turn north on Lake. The 2 and 38 busses stop at Park Presidio one and two blocks south, respectively. Muni will let you bring your dog on board between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. weekdays, and anytime on weekends. Only one non-service dog can ride per bus and he or she needs to be muzzled and leashed. Payment of an adult fare is required.

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