

Mokelumne Coast to Crest Trail Independence Flat Trail Loop at Middle Bar, Mokelumne River [26-Nov-12]



Distance: 4.0 miles

Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult

Start Elevation: 600 feet

Total Elevation Gain: 600 feet

Parking: 120 45' 1.58" W 38 17' 54.68" N

Trailhead: 120 44' 58.27"W 38 17' 50.74" N

Permits:

This segment of the Mokelumne Coast to Crest Trail (MCCT) is located on watershed lands managed by the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD). Over the past 20 years, EBMUD has constructed 36 miles of trails for hiking and horseback riding from Camanche Reservoir past Pardee Reservoir and ending near Hwy 49. EBMUD protects these watershed lands to ensure a safe water supply. Please respect the use rules that are detailed in the trail permit required to enter the watershed. Also respect private property adjacent to the trail. Please be aware that the disturbance of any area or collection of any objects is strictly prohibited. Permits are available on line for a small fee at [EBMUD Permits](#). Be aware that pets and bicycles are not allowed on EBMUD trails.

Directions:

The only permitted access to the trail is from the Middle Bar Take Out described below. Parking (no trailers) is available at the 'Middle Bar Take Out' on the north (Amador) side of the Mokelumne River next to the Middle Bar Bridge. From Jackson drive south on Hwy 49 for

a half mile beyond Broadway, turn west (right) on Middle Bar Road, and continue 2.7 miles to the parking lot. From Hwy 26, drive to Paloma, turn north onto Gwinn Mine Road, drive down the canyon to the Mokelumne River and cross the Middle Bar Bridge, a distance of 3.3 miles.

To access the trailhead walk to the south side of the bridge and turn left (east) to the toilets and a sign-in booth. Follow the arrows and signage on the trail posts.

A Little History:

In January of 1848 gold was discovered on the American River and the following summer miners were working the rich deposits at Middle Bar on the Mokelumne River. Gold seekers James Carson, John and Daniel Murphy, and Henry and George Angel soon moved south and pioneered the communities of Carson Hill, Murphys Camp, and Angels Camp. Soldiers discharged from Col. Stevenson's Regiment stayed and wintered over in Mokelumne Hill, soon to become the largest community on the River.

The “diggings” were so rich in this vicinity, however, that a small community sprang up on Independence Flat (located at the top of this trail loop). The placer mining activities depended on water supplied by the extensive Mokelumne Hill-Campo Seco Ditch system. Piles of rock mounds along the trail document work with long-toms and ground sluicing while stacked rock walls attest to the ingenuity and skills of these argonauts. When the easy gold ran out, the community of Independence Flat disappeared and the landscape became grazing ground for generations of Italian-American ranching families.

During explorations to establish a trail that would complete the eastern boundary of the MCCT, EBMUD Trailbusters discovered historic Gold-Rush remains and discuss them in this brochure for your enjoyment.

Trail Construction:

The 1.6 mile trail segment above the Mokelumne River was constructed in 2009-2012 by the recreation staff at EBMUD, the volunteer Trailbusters, the California Conservation Corps and the inmate crews from the Vallecito and Pine Grove Conservation Camps. Together they flagged the proposed route, cleared and burned brush, constructed new trail by hand and with heavy equipment, groomed the historic segments with hand tools, built rock walls, fabricated the new foot bridge and installed signage. During construction, the watershed was protected using three erosion control devices designed to minimize storm runoff from carrying sediments into the river: black plastic silt fence, straw coils, and woven jute netting. Seeding grass and mulching disturbed soil helped to stabilize the

hillside soils through the winter rains.

We residents of Amador and Calaveras County recognize the major effort made by EBMUD in the development, maintenance and operation of recreational facilities in the Camanche and Pardee Watersheds and are truly thankful!

Trail Description:

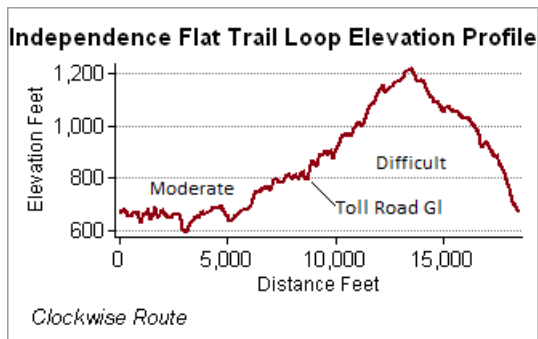
The parking lot is located in the old community of Middle Bar. Established during the Gold Rush, it consisted of about a dozen houses, a hotel/way station and a school that operated into the 1930s. Cross the historic iron truss Clinton Bridge, installed 1912 and enter the trailhead on the left.

From the trailhead follow the trail signs marked with the MCCT logo.



Proceed east on the historic dirt road up Jack Ass Gulch that once linked Middle Bar with the town of Mokelumne Hill. Immediately on your right are remains of stone walls and a large mine adit that mark part of the old Middle Bar community. Do not turn right on the

narrow gauge segment of the MCCT going west to Poormans Gulch. After crossing the Gulch, the old road to Mokelumne Hill continues up the drainage to the right, but you take the fork to the left and continue to the trail loop that is marked by a trail post. This trail guide describes the loop in a clockwise direction, so turn left onto the lower road that heads toward the river and follow the trail signs.



The road ends at a new narrow gauge trail that parallels the river for 1.6 miles up a gentle 5% slope, of moderate difficulty, under the shade of an oak canopy, crossing six gulches. The first is **Garavanta Gulch** identified by the dry-laid (no mortar) rock wall. The Garavanta family had a large ranch at Middle Bar and were part of the community of Genovese immigrants that came to Mokelumne Hill in the 1870s.

Dell’Orto Gulch, with a zig-zag approach to the new bridge, is named for another Italian-American family who have ranched this land for generations. The bridge provides a good place to view the results from decades of placer mining. As “free gold” (gold already eroded out of parent quartz veins) washed down the hillside creeks, some of it was caught in the rocks and gravels in the bottom. To reach this ‘pay dirt’, miners dug up the overlying earth and

washed it with water in pans, rockers, sluice boxes and long-toms (a long series of sluice boxes) where the heavy gold sank to the bottom while the lighter soils and minerals were carried off. Rocks were stacked along the creek forming retaining walls to allow the diggings to deepen the channel. The banks of the creek were also mined, changing the contour of the gully from V- to U-shaped, leaving mounds of washed rocks (tailings).

Washing dirt required a reliable water source and placer mining on seasonal drainages like Dell’Orto Gulch was first limited to the rainy season. While there was plenty of water in the Mokelumne River just a hundred feet below, the lack of pumps made it unavailable. Once the Independence branch of Mokelumne Hill-Campo Seco Ditch was completed by 1855, water could be purchased by individual mining operations. The Independence Ditch ended in a large reservoir just above EBMUD property from where it fed water to downhill miners, often using the existing gulches along with riveted iron pipes, earthen ditches, and canvas hoses. When you reach the top of the loop trail you will see extensive placer mining remains that sit at the head of Dell’Orto Gulch.

As you exit the bridge and climb the trail switchbacks, note the area around the telephone pole on your left and the remnants of a miner’s stone chimney (surrounded by poison oak!). Nearby, but out of view, are a few flat pads sitting on rock foundations where the miners probably pitched their tents. As you follow the trail toward **Stewart Gulch** (named for the 1899 homesteader of this river frontage) you will see evidence of surface mining

along the downhill side. This activity was fed by water likely run in a pipe laid along the path you are now walking. Occasional deep gullies below the path mark the locations of “blow outs,” breaks in the water system that were common.

The trail connecting **Independence Gulch, Cuneo Gulch** (named for another early Italian family), and **Toll Road Gulch** runs along the route of the old water line. The absence of a berm and the steep grade suggests that riveted iron pipe and or canvas hose were the main devices used to convey the water rather than an open ditch.

From Toll Road Gulch you begin the difficult segment of the trail. It climbs an old road grade to an open grassy area on the top of the hill where the old community of Independence Flat was

located. A few remnants of stone structures mark this once booming camp. As the road turns west away from modern Highway 49, extensive placer grounds are visible to the left (east) reaching up to the historic Independence Reservoir (above EBMUD property). Intense placer mining has also transformed the gullies on your right, the upper reaches of Dell’Orto Gulch, into a mass of waste rock piles and water channels.

The final segment of the trail passes through the old ranch lands of the Dell’Orto family and provides wonderful views down the Mokelumne River Canyon. The steep descent brings you back to the head of the trail loop, from where you continue west, cross Jackass Gulch, and exit the trail at the Middle Bar Bridge.

References:

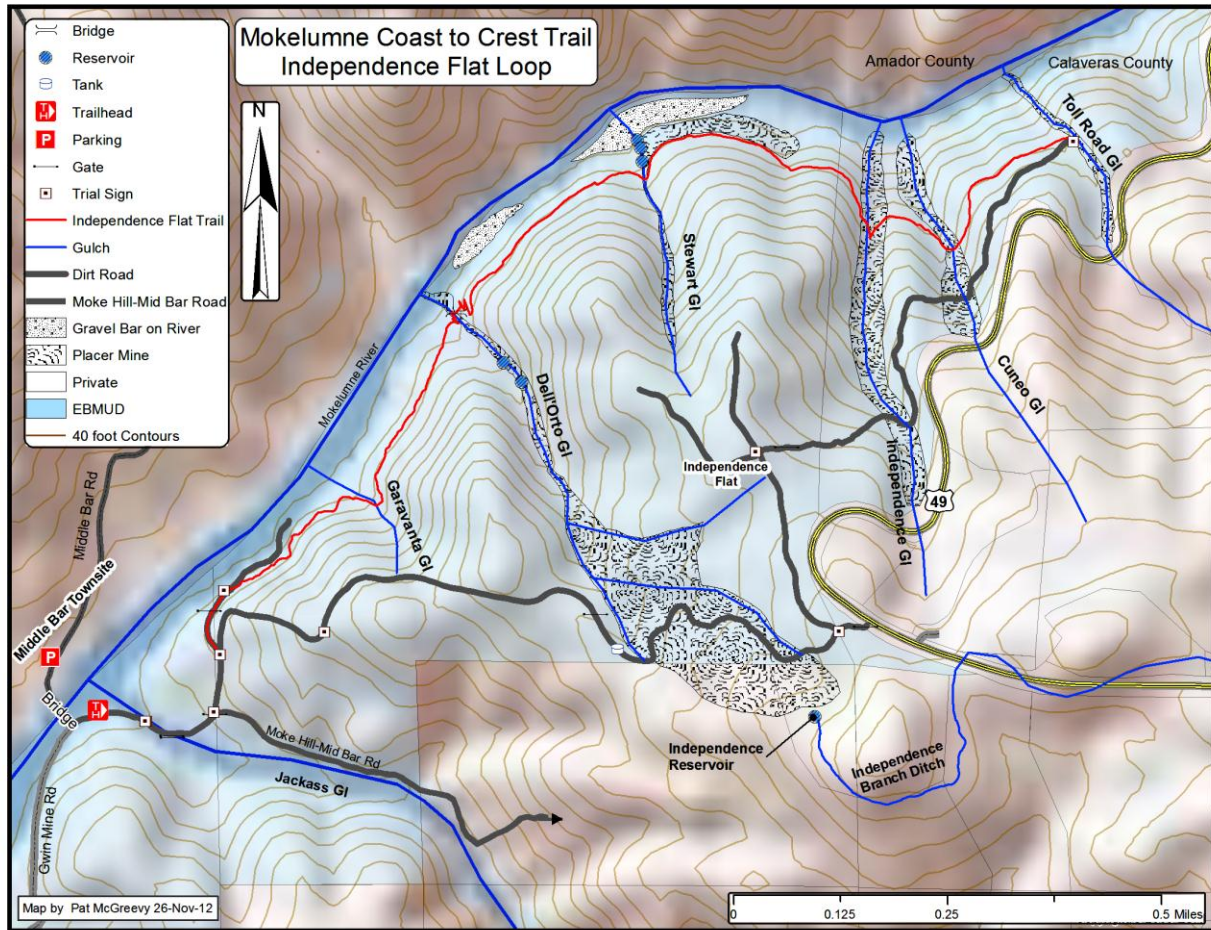
East Bay Municipal Utility District, [Sierra Foothills Trails](#) .

Goddard, George. Map of a Survey of the Mokelumne Hill Canal and Reconnaissance of the Adjoining Country. Lithograph by Britton & Rey, San Francisco. [University of California, Berkeley](#).

Mokelumne Monitor, Fall 2010, Middle Bar...Where Do We Go from Here, [Newsletter of the Mokelumne Trailbusters](#) .

Mokelumne Monitor, Spring 2012, From Past to Present (The Independence Flat Segment of the MCCT), [Newsletter of the Mokelumne Trailbusters](#) .

Peterson, J and Lima, B. 1999. The History of the Calaveras Public Utility District. Calaveras Public Utility District, San Andreas, CA. 68 pp.



Emergencies: 911

Nearby Medical Facilities:

- St Joseph's Hospital
768 Mountain Ranch Rd, San Andreas
(209) 754-3521
- Sutter Amador Hospital
200 Mission Boulevard, Jackson
(209) 223-7555

Calaveras Sheriff: (209) 754-6500

EBMUD

- Pardee Area Control Center during daylight hours, (209)772-8208
- Oakland Call Center, 24/7, (866)403-2683

Questions & Suggestions: Steve Diers at sdiers@ebmud.com.