

Did you know that Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve borders a National Historic Site? Learn more with us on this guided virtual hike.

Every year as part of the Eugene O'Neill Festival, celebrating the life and works of noted American playwright Eugene O'Neill, we co-host a hike with the National Park Service and the Eugene O'Neill Foundation. This year, with the particulars of COVID-19 making an in-person ranger-led hike impractical, we have created a virtual hike to accompany the "Virtual Gene" (www.eugeneoneill.org) event which will be on-going throughout this summer and fall.

Grab a mask, get with your social bubble, and come with us along the Iron Horse Trail, into Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve and to Tao House at Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site: approximately four miles one way with an elevation gain of 337 feet (See map below). Rangers will be sharing the cultural and environmental history along our route through a variety of thought-provoking facts and questions, beautiful photos, and engaging videos all contained in this guide.

All of this content can be accessed using the Interactive Google Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1WeQyce2oRXCnhYKdhIWlvfv1efdBOWvO&usp=sharing>

If you don't want to do the hike, but would just like to learn more about our parks, you can watch the videos for both park stops here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIndhQo3sXwc6CVFSiFLWHbWYWtpxOeBc>

"Happiness hates the timid!" said O'Neill, so why not go on an adventure? See you at the top!

1. Front Street Park

We start our journey at this small pocket park across the street from the Danville Library. Plaques dedicated to the work of Eugene O'Neill are displayed here. America's only Nobel Prize winning playwright, Eugene O'Neill, chose to live in Danville, California, at the height of his writing career. Isolated from the world and within the walls of his home, O'Neill wrote his final and most memorable plays; The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten.

Let's let East Bay Regional Park Naturalist Ashley Grenier tell you more about our route: <https://youtu.be/nwHlhYZ6dtU>

As you walk through town and hike into the hills of Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve toward Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site, take a moment to appreciate how city life, art, and nature connect.

Walk North along Front Street and turn left onto Prospect Street. Continue on Prospect Street until you reach the yellow train depot building: The Museum of the San Ramon Valley, 205 Railroad Avenue, Danville, CA 94526

Photo 1: A free-standing sculpture of a passage of text from "Long Day's Journey into Night"
NPS photo by Altman Studeny.



2. The Museum of the San Ramon Valley

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is dedicated to preserving and celebrating our rich history and heritage. The collections and exhibits reflect our human experiences, institutions, and cultures that were shaped by the valley's landscape, environment, and early settlers. The Museum features permanent and revolving exhibits, guided tours, and school programs."

<https://museumsrv.org/>

Cross Prospect Street and turn right to get on the Iron Horse Regional Trail. Continue for approximately 1 mile and then pause at the bench near stop #3 and take a break.

Photo 2: The historic yellow railroad depot which houses the Museum of the San Ramon Valley. NPS photo by Tory Starling.



3. The Iron Horse Trail

Spanning a distance of 32 miles, East Bay Regional Park District's Iron Horse Regional Trail is a multi-use, whole-access regional trail connecting the cities of Concord and Pleasanton. The trail follows the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way established in 1891 and abandoned in 1978. Representing inter-agency cooperation and community-wide efforts by individuals and groups, this trail creates an important recreational and commute component for the communities it serves.

Continue along the Iron Horse trail for approximately 1 mile. Turn left on Camille Ave. Then take a left onto Camille Lane and proceed .2 miles. As Camille lane jogs right, (see Photo 3)enter the dirt path behind the fence. There is a brown EBRPD sign at the entrance to the path. Continue on the path approximately .2 miles to stop #4.

Photo 3a: Person riding a bike on the trail. Photo by Urban Diversion.

Photo 3b: Reddish wooden bench along the Iron Horse Trail Plaque reads " GIVE ME BIRDS, FLOWERS, AND A FINE DAY FOR WALKING. THAT'S MUSIC OUT OF DOORS! -HLH." NPS Photo Tory Starling.

Photo 3c: Turn from Camille Ave. and follow the dirt path. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.





4. Introduction to Las Trampas Regional Wilderness

Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve, on ancestral land of Tatcan Bay-Miwok people, is one of 73 parks in the East Bay Regional Park District. The park offers 5,778 acres of remote and rugged terrain leaving its visitors with the sense that they have escaped from the hustle and bustle of the urban Bay Area. Eugene O'Neill once said this place "...is absolute country...without a taint of suburbia...yet only three-quarters of an hour motor ride from Frisco." When you explore Las Trampas, you'll be surrounded by breathtaking geologic features, diverse flora and fauna, and a patchwork of ecosystems. https://www.ebparks.org/parks/las_trampas/

Photo 4a: Entrance to Las Trampas Regional Wilderness. A dirt path going uphill surrounded by trees including eucalyptus and oaks. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.

Photo 4b: Rock formations above Sycamore Trail in spring. Photo by David Abercrombie.

Photo 4c: Looking east from Rocky Ridge across Bollinger Canyon to Las Trampas Ridge and Mt. Diablo. Photo by Mary Behrendt.

Photo 4d: Hikers with two dogs walking on a trail through the green hills of Las Trampas Wilderness. Photo by Greg Brian.







5. Ecology of Las Trampas

We can thank the presence of two major Bay Area faults—Las Trampas and Bollinger faults—for the rugged terrain and diverse ecosystems at Las Trampas. These faults have helped create canyons, creeks, springs, and steep hillsides that are home to many plant and animal species native to California. In the winter, the rains fill up Bollinger Creek and California newts can be found on their annual migration. In the spring, a beautiful array of wildflowers bloom along the trails throughout the park. And in the fall, hawks and eagles can be seen soaring above, looking for a secret place to call home.

Continue along the trail for approximately .1 mile.

Photo 5a: Black oak tree with roots exposed along the path. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.

Photo 5b: Outcroppings of rock within areas of green trees. Photo by sfbaywalk, Flickr.

Photo 5c: California newt (*Taricha torosa*). Photo by Jerry Ting, Flickr.

Photo 5d: Cream cups (*Platystemon californicus*) wildflowers. Photo by John K., Flickr.







6. Tao House comes into view

"I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself!"

As you catch your first glimpse of Tao House from this hilly rise, Edmund Tyrone's description of his own "high spots" in Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey Into Night" (quote above) can be a good guide as you near the National Historic Site. Hike on with all your senses ready to see, feel, smell, and hear the environment that you're now a part of. Can you experience yourself "dissolved" into your surroundings as Edmund once did?

Continue along the trail for about 150 feet to get a great view of Mt. Diablo at stop 7.

Photo 6: Trees frame a distant view of Tao House, a white brick building with terra cotta roof tiles. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.



7. Mt. Diablo Comes into View

Stand tall and take a deep breath in and out. After climbing up the trail you are rewarded with a view of Mt. Diablo to the east. As we gaze into the distance, we are reminded of the beauty held in these open spaces where we can find peace and solace as playwright Eugene O'Neill did in his time.

Continue on the Madrone Trail for approximately .3 miles to reach stop 8.

Photo 7: Trees and a blue sky frame a distant view of Mt. Diablo. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.



8. A Web of Water

This turn in the trail gives you a good look into the bed of one of the many small creeks that run through Las Trampas, likely dry of water but full, instead, with clues that water is an integral part of this landscape. Springs in the hills high above your head and aquifers deep beneath your feet both contribute to the watershed that allows this ecosystem to grow lushly with big leaf maple, buckeye, four different species of oak, half a dozen species of fern, and fragrant bay laurel. Those same springs also supplied the O'Neill's with water for drinking, washing, and filling the swimming pool at Tao House, seen in the second photo.

Think back on some of the other ecosystems you passed on your hike to this point: how did they look or feel different compared to where you're standing now? And, as you hike on, what can you notice as the land changes again?

Photo 8a: A dirt trail curving around a creek bed filled with wild plants and trees. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.

Photo 8b: An historic photo of the swimming pool at Tao House with Mt. Diablo in the distance. NPS Photo.





Image Courtesy of Eugene O'Neil NHS, EUON 1 391 I

9. A Home in Nature

Here, nearly four hundred feet above the town of Danville, you may catch a glimpse of red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures soaring in the updraft. Coots can often be seen wading on the pond to your left, and western scrub jays, spotted towhees, and acorn woodpeckers are common near this stop, as well. (Look for an acorn cache— photo two—in the electric pole by the gate when you cross into the National Park site!) Ground squirrels, bobcats, coyotes— among many other mammals— snakes, lizards, spiders, and insects of all kinds make this land their home.

These animals all appreciate the solitude that the O'Neill's were seeking when making a home here, as well. As you hike through the wilderness of Las Trampas, remember that you are a visitor to a complex habitat. In a time when many feel isolated from their usual social routines, however, now is the perfect chance to respectfully reconnect with our place in the web of interrelationships that make up the natural world.

Photo 9a: An historic pond for watering cows surrounded by trees and dark yellow grass with a barn in the distance. NPS Photo by Tory Starling.

Photo 9b: Electrical Pole covered in holes filled with acorns. NPS Photo by Altman Studeny.





10. Eugene O'Neill NHS - Tao House

"Strong winds do not last all morning, hard rains do not last all day." So writes the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (6th Century BCE) in the "Tao Te Ching," a text with profound influence on the history of Eastern spirituality and for which the O'Neill's named their home. The Tao-- or "The Way"-- emphasizes that life is always flowing between states: no conditions are permanent. As you look around the grounds of Tao House, what do you see that calls to mind that philosophy?

Eugene O'Neill wrote his last and most influential plays, including "The Iceman Cometh" and "Long Day's Journey into Night," from the study on the second floor of the east wing of Tao House. His creativity required solitude and here, in rural California during the 1930s and '40s, he found few distractions. Ranger Altman Studeny with Eugene O'Neill NHS can tell you more: <https://youtu.be/w3OkeOUYLIs>

Before returning to Danville the way you came, feel free to spend some time with the solitude of Tao House. Does its nearness to nature inspire you, as well? If so, feel free to share a few words on the Eugene O'Neill NHS Facebook page, send us an e-mail or letter, or give us a call. All contact information can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/euon/>

Photo 10a: The white wall which surrounds the courtyard of Tao House with a valley oak in the foreground. NPS photo by Altman Studeny.

Photo 10b: An historic photo of Eugene and Carlotta (Monterey) O'Neill at Tao House in 1937 with trees behind them. NPS Photo 2103.





Image Courtesy of Eugene O'Neill N H S, EUON 210 3