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## Santa Clara County: Lots of trail, lots of gaps

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When it comes to the Bay Area Ridge Trail, Santa Clara County holds a unique distinction.

It has the most completed miles of ridge trail — 72 — of any Bay Area county. But it also has the most unfinished miles — 118.

Why so many unfinished miles?

Santa Clara County has more active agricultural land than many of the eight other Bay Area counties. Also, it got a relatively late start establishing large networks of parks, compared with other counties such as Alameda. From 1950 to 1969, when former San Jose City Manager Anthony P. "Dutch" Hamann led a massive effort to expand San Jose, sprawl was the order of the day, not trail-building.

Much of Santa Clara Valley and some of its

hillsides are developed, but large amounts of vacant land remain, blocked from development by tough zoning rules.

"In the South Bay, the land has belonged traditionally to farmers and orchard growers. Those families don't want people trekking through their lands," said Jean Rusmore, author of "Bay Area Ridge Trail: The Official Guide." "It's not any kind of a plot against the ridge trail, it's just reality that it's always harder in the last stretch."

The gaps are large, but open space leaders say they are slowly making progress.

"We are respecting private property rights, trying to maintain agriculture, provide solitude and security for the hikers, and trying to find the best route," said Patrick Congdon, general manager

of the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority.

Since it opened in 1993, Congdon's agency has purchased land or development rights on 15,170 acres. But it was sued twice by taxpayer groups, and it spent years in court. Only one of its four preserves has ridge trail open.

The trail now runs mostly through county parks such as Almaden Quicksilver and Coyote Creek. Large gaps exist from Mount Umunhum to Mount Madonna; around Gilroy; and from Anderson Lake near Morgan Hill to Joseph D. Grant County Park.

Among the gaps:

- The 6,500-acre Sargent Ranch south of Gilroy, whose owner filed for bankruptcy in January.
- The 5,200-acre United Technologies Corporation property north of Morgan Hill,

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where contractors are cleaning up after 45 years of rocket engine testing.

- The San Felipe Ranch, 28,000 acres in San Jose's east foothills, owned by the Hewlett and Packard heirs. In 2009, both families donated development rights to the Nature Conservancy, but the agreement didn't include a public trail corridor through the huge property, said Daniel Olstein, a project director with the conservancy. For now, small pieces will be added by putting trails along some South County roads, and when parks agencies buy land from willing sellers, Congdon said. "I think you are going to see some completed in the next 10 years, but realistically, it will be 20 years before we complete every trail segment," Congdon said. "It can take three, four, five years for just one property." **Contact Paul Rogers at 408-920-5045. Five cool places in Santa Clara County**

Views: Joseph D. Grant County Park: Sweeping views of the Diablo Range and Santa Clara County from ridge tops.

Where: Take the Alum Rock exit from I-680, go 8 miles to the park. Hike on the hilly Dutch Flat Trail to its 2457-foot vista point.

History: Almaden Quicksilver County Park: Historic mercury mining equipment and museum explaining the area's 19th century mercury mines. Where: From Almaden Expressway, proceed 3 miles along Almaden Road through the town of New Almaden, through the town of New Almaden to the park.

Recreation: Coyote Creek Parkway: More

than 15 miles of flat, paved trail along Coyote Creek for walking, biking, rollerblading or strollers. Where: From Highway 101, take the Hellyer Ave. exit, bear right, and left on Hellyer Ave. to Hellyer County Park.

Lake: Coyote Lake-Harvey Bear County Park: Views of 635-acre Coyote Lake and its boats. Where: From Highway 101 in Gilroy, take the Leavesley Road exit. Go east for 2 miles, then north on New Avenue and east on Roop Road. Go 3 miles. Turn left into the park.

Kites & wildflowers: Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve: Hike up the 3-mile Boccardo Trail from Alum Rock Park to breezy meadows above San Jose. From I-680, take the Berryessa Road exit, go right on Piedmont Road, and left at Penitencia Creek Road to Alum Rock Park.

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