



Photo by Christopher Campbell

Bernal Hill, like most California grasslands turns a golden hue in the summertime.

Bernal Hill San Francisco



American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*

American Kestrels have reddish brown backs and tails and a characteristic gray, black and white face pattern with two moustache-like, vertical stripes. The outer feathers on the pointed wings of the male are blue gray, and the female's are reddish brown.

These members of the falcon family nest in tree cavities, woodpecker holes, crevices of buildings, cracks in rocks, nest boxes or even the old nests of other birds. Although many species of birds might be discouraged by life in a city setting, American Kestrels are little bothered by the urban bustle around them.

They are excellent hunters. Aided by their hooked beaks, keen eyesight, swift flight, and curved talons, American Kestrels hunt rodents and other small animals found on Bernal Hill. Their eyesight is especially important for hunting rodents, who leave "urine highways" as they scurry through grasslands. This is a way for rodents to communicate with one another and mark navigation routes. The highways reflect ultraviolet light which is invisible to humans, but visible to American Kestrels and other raptors that have evolved to be able to see ultraviolet light.

To learn more about Bernal Hill, including getting involved in caring for its natural resources, call (415) 831-6328 or go to www.parks.sfgov.org and click on Volunteer Program. The Bernal Hilltop Grassland Restoration group works every third Sunday of the month from 11 am – 2 pm. For additional details, call Barbara Pitschel at (415) 282-5066. You can also check out the California Native Plant Society at www.cnps-yerbabuena.org for additional volunteer opportunities.

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San Francisco Recreation & Parks
Natural Areas and Volunteer Programs
McLaren Lodge
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San Francisco, CA 94117



Bernal Hill: Significant Natural Resource Area and Dog Play Area

Tips for dog walking on Bernal Hill

- Familiarize yourself with the natural features of your park.
- Play fetch in areas least threatened by erosion, such as the quarries, Saddle area, and paved portions of Bernal Heights Park (see map).
- Encourage your dog to use stairs and designated trails when hiking on slopes and in sensitive areas such as the northwest slopes of Bernal Hill.
- Prevent all digging.

Information courtesy of greendogwalks.org

Bernal Hill is a favorite spot for Bernal's human and dog residents.



Photo by Rachel Keiser

NATURE'S BOUNTY: A Busy Grassland

Bernal Hill's steep slopes support a thriving grassland community. In the summer and fall, its grasslands are dry and parched, and Bernal Hill appears from a distance to be a tawny, uninhabitable monolith. By early February, the Hill has transformed into a palette of brilliant colors. Many native wildflowers including footsteps of spring, clarkia, suncups, checker lily, blue-eyed grass, checkerbloom, and shooting star erupt from Bernal Hill. Native purple needlegrass and red fescue blow in waves on windy afternoons.

With a diversity of native plants, an assortment of native animal life can survive. Over 40 species of birds

are known to utilize Bernal Hill, including Anna's Hummingbirds, Dark-eyed Juncos, Burrowing Owls, American Kestrels, Western Meadowlarks and Townsend's Warblers. These birds forage and hunt in the native grasslands in search of a tasty meal of seeds, berries, nectar or invertebrates. Northern alligator lizards and gopher snakes bask in the sunny warmth provided by Bernal's prevalent rocky outcrops. Other wildlife, such as Botta's pocket gophers, California slender salamanders, arboreal salamanders, and raccoons, also call Bernal Hill home.

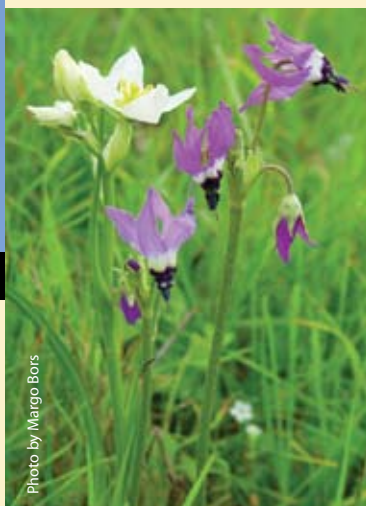


Photo by Margo Bois

Shooting stars are some of the most loved wildflowers of western North America. This perennial relative of the garden cyclamen can be found nestled among short grasses, from which its 8-10 inch high flower stalk protrudes. The nodding flowers with curved rose-magenta anthers remind some people of a shooting star, and others of mosquitoes or rooster heads.

Shooting stars, *Dodecatheon, clevelandii* ssp. *patulum*



Layers of chert

The Western Meadowlarks at Bernal Hill rely on seeds, insects and open grassy areas to get them through the winter. The patterned, straw-colored back feathers of meadowlarks help camouflage them in their grassland environment as they forage low to the ground. When they sit up however, their bright yellow breast and white outer tail feathers are visible. In spring the flocks in the Bay Area seek out more secluded grasslands and open habitats where they can hide their woven nests on the ground. The meadowlark's melodic, bubbling song can sometimes be heard before the birds depart.



Photo by Walter Kitundu

Western Meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta*

Bernal Hill features dramatic outcrops of an exquisite, almost glass-like rock called chert. Chert is a sedimentary rock composed of the skeletons of single-celled microscopic sea organisms called radiolarian. The radiolarian shells give chert a distinctive luster. If you examine a thin slice of the rock under a microscope, you can see the delicate star-shaped radiolarian. One of the most arresting occurrences of chert formations on the Hill occurs on the south side along Bernal Hill Boulevard. Here, the layers are so folded and fractured, you can imagine the spectacular geologic forces that once upon a time hauled this chert from its ocean floor birthplace.

BERNAL HILL TRAILS AND POINTS OF INTEREST



Photo by Margo Bors

Checker lily, *Fritillaria affinis*



Bernal Hill is located off Bernal Heights Boulevard.

Park Size: 24 acres

Natural Area Size: 24 acres

Points of Interest

- 1 South Quarry
- 2 East Quarry
- 3 Saddle

--- Recommended Trails

— Paved Trail/Road

P Parking

An Oasis of Biodiversity

The city of San Francisco covers the northern portion of the San Francisco peninsula—a landscape that was once continuous wildlands from San Bruno Mountain to the Golden Gate Headlands. Called the Franciscan Biological Region, this area was once home to many species of plants and animals, some of which never lived anywhere else. Today only small pieces of this environment remain as Natural Areas managed by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department's Natural Areas Program. Bernal Hill is one of these valuable natural areas, an oasis in a sea of development.

LAND USE HISTORY:

From Ranch to Neighborhood

The Ohlone Indians were the first people to live near Bernal Hill. They built a small village called *Awaa-te* in the warm, fog-free valley where today sit the Bernal and Mission neighborhoods. They gathered seafood from a lagoon off of Mission Bay and used plants from grassland communities like Bernal Hill for the remainder of their food and medicinal needs.

After the arrival of Spanish explorers, Bernal Hill was made part of a 4,446-acre land grant awarded to Jose Cornelio de Bernal, a soldier in Anza's expedition. The grant extended south from current-day Cesar Chavez Street to Daly City.

In the mid-1800s, the Bernal Heights neighborhood emerged. The streets were laid out and named, and many small- to moderate-sized homes were built. A tight-knit community, including many Irish, Scotch and Scandinavians, took up residence in the shadow of Bernal Hill. Residents used Bernal Hill extensively for cattle and dairy ranching. In 1876, a Frenchman named Victor Resayre announced his discovery of gold on the hill's summit, and for several days following Bernal Hill was the site of extensive mining efforts—until it was revealed that the supposed gold was only quartz.

The City of San Francisco at one point unsuccessfully planned to level the Bernal Hill summit to construct an airplane field. In 1973, Bernal residents lobbied the Department of Public Works to give Bernal Hill to the Recreation and Park Department, thus preserving it as a permanent open space. Today, many residents, alongside the city's Natural Areas Program, are working to protect the Hill's plant and animal communities.



Bernal Hill 1936, looking southwest with Bernal Heights Blvd. above and Folsom St. below.



Looking southwest toward Bernal Hill