The Pacific Skyline Council Camps Historic Trail is a 12.4 mile hike linking the three camps of the old San Mateo County Council that were located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It follows existing trails from Camp Pescadero situated in Memorial Park to Camp Pomponio in the heart of Pescadero Creek County Park to the boundary of Big Basin State Park and along China Grade into Cutter Scout Reservation. Although it is nicely shaded under a forest cover for most of its length, the trail is moderately strenuous due to a long climb up Butano Ridge and has a net elevation gain of +1730 feet from start to finish.

**Tour Plan Required**
The trail starts in Memorial Park at the Hoffman Creek Trailhead and ends at Cutter Scout Reservation. It passes through the restricted San Mateo County Sheriff’s Honor Camp, and therefore advance registration is mandatory through the submission of an official BSA Tour Plan. Complete and e-mail this plan to the Pacific Skyline Council Foster City Service Center at tourplans@pacsky.org at least 14 days in advance to ensure the council has enough time to review the plan and fax it to the Sheriff’s Office to notify them of your trip. When the review is complete, the second half of the plan is returned to you to carry as your approval to enter the restricted area. Be prepared to show your Tour Plan to patrolling sheriff’s deputies if requested. (They may also ask for your point of contact in the Sheriff’s Office. Please refer to the Resources section below.) If you do not have a valid Tour Plan in your possession, please take the alternate route around the north side of the Sheriff’s Honor Camp.

**Directions to the Hoffman Creek Trailhead**
From the bayside of the peninsula, use SR 84 west from either I-280, US 101 or SR 35 (Skyline Boulevard). Travel westbound down SR 84 from Skyline Boulevard to Pescadero Road near the Town of La Honda. Turn left (south) on Pescadero Road. Follow Pescadero Road to Wurr Road just before the Memorial Park entrance. Turn left onto Wurr Road and park at the Hoffman Creek Trailhead.

From the coastside, take Highway 1 to Pescadero Road. Follow Pescadero Road past the Memorial Park entrance and turn right onto Wurr Road. Park at the Hoffman Creek Trailhead.

**Directions to Cutter Scout Reservation**
From the Town of Saratoga, take SR 9 westbound over Skyline Boulevard to the intersection with SR 236. Continue straight on SR 236 towards Big Basin. Turn right onto China Grade and follow it for 4 miles until the dirt road arrives at the Cutter Scout Reservation ranger’s cabin. Turn left and follow the signs to the Harkson Lodge parking lot.

**Precautions**
The trail crosses a ford of Pescadero Creek which may be challenging during the winter or after a rain. Use caution when crossing. Likewise, the trail may be slick and muddy in spots after rainfall. There is also poison oak and stinging nettle so learn to identify and avoid these plants. Be on the watch for ticks as they are plentiful in these woods. Carry enough water for the entire trip. Do not drink the water from the streams. The last segment of the trail is on a busy camp road. Use extreme caution to avoid cars going to and from the camp.

**Resources**
The map used for the trail is the Sempervirens Fund Map 1: Trail Map of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Call them at (650) 949-1453 to order your copy.
Resources, continued

Brochure on Memorial & Pescadero Creek County Parks:
http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/Attachments/parks/Files/Brochures/PescaderoBrochure.web.pdf

Information on Cutter Scout Reservation: http://www.pacsky.org/Camps/Cutter.aspx

Submit to: Pacific Skyline Council, BSA
e-mail completed pdf document to tourplans@pacsky.org
(Note: Tour Plans are not being processed in the Palo Alto office.)

San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office point of contact:
Michael Mitchell, Correctional Officer
Jail Planning Unit
650-508-6723
Fax: 650-632-4053
The History of San Mateo County Council Camps

Pacific Skyline Council was formed in 1994 from the merger of San Mateo County Council and Stanford Area Council in Palo Alto. Both owned summer camps located in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Stanford’s Boulder Creek Scout Reservation and San Mateo’s Cutter Scout Reservation. Pacific Skyline Council now holds both camps, plus Camp Oljato in the Sierra Nevada.

When the first official San Mateo County Boy Scout troops were organized under the auspices of the Boy Scouts of America after 1910, Scouts were already hiking and camping in locales such as Purisima Canyon, Pilarcitos Lake, and Butano Falls. In 1916, the San Francisco Area Council was formed and San Mateo County was folded into it as a district. The modern concept of a summer camp had not yet evolved, and the early Scout encampments were dubbed “training camps” that followed a military model and took place at ranches or other locations outside of town.

Camp Pescadero

San Mateo District leaders were interested in developing a training camp for San Mateo County Scouts that would be more convenient than the San Francisco camps that had been located in the early years in Marin and Sonoma counties across the Golden Gate. In 1926, a use permit was obtained from the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to establish an 11 acre camp in Memorial Park. The ground was leveled and tent platforms, parade grounds, shower facilities, mess hall, trading post and campfire were built. The San Mateo County Training Camp (SMCTC, also known as Camp Pescadero) opened its first session from August 2-18, 1926. 156 Scouts and 12 leaders attended camp that first year. Cost was $8 per week. Starting in 1928, two 2-week sessions were offered to accommodate the demand.

Pescadero Creek was dammed to create an area for boating & swimming. Scouts learned knots, studied nature, and hiked into the surrounding forests. One of the popular program features in later years was the “Portola Trek,” a hike from the camp to Portola Redwoods State Park. Scouts were organized into four companies A through D (and sometimes E if needed) of about 40 Scouts each, headed by a company commander on the staff. Troop formations and a parade in front of The Chief, Scout Executive Ed Barrer, took place on the parade grounds. A canon was fired off when the flag was raised in the morning and lowered in the evening. Guests would come on Sundays to observe the proceedings and enjoy the performance of the Scout band. The band, which grew to be as large as 50 pieces, was led by Eugene O. “Gene” Brose and organized as Burlingame Troop 155. It was in residence during both camp sessions, playing at the evening parade and performing a half-hour concert at the campfire each night at the site of the park’s current amphitheater.

In the mid-1920’s, the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America began investigating options for a program for younger Scouts, and by 1929 they had authorized a select few councils to organize experimental Cub Scout packs. Burlingame Cub Pack 6 was formed in 1927 and they regularly attended Camp Pescadero each year until Cubbing was officially launched nationally in 1933 and camping was eliminated from the Cub Scout program.
San Mateo County Area Council broke off from San Francisco Council and established its own independent identity on January 1, 1932. The routine at Camp Pescadero remained virtually unchanged through the 1930’s and 40’s, with Scout Executive Ed Barrer acting as the camp chief and his former Scouts serving on staff. The camp continued to operate during World War II, although campers were required to submit a certain number of food ration coupons in addition to the camp fee.

**Camp Pomponio**

After World War II, the numbers of campers at Camp Pescadero began to increase while Memorial Park itself also attracted more use from the general public, thanks in part to the growing popularity of the automobile. It soon became clear that it would no longer be able to serve the needs of the Scouts, and so the search for another location began.

Further upstream along Pescadero Creek was a 160-acre property known as England Camp or the England Estate that belonged to A. E. England of San Francisco, a longtime supporter of Scouting. Mrs. England would frequently serve cookies and cold drinks to Scouts hiking to Portola State Park. When she heard of the council’s interest in a new summer camp site, she sold her estate to San Mateo County Area Council in 1948 for a token payment. Their house was used for many years by the camp ranger and program director, while a new filtered water swimming pool replaced the formal gardens. A camp kitchen, first aid station and tent platforms were also built for the first summer camp session in 1949. The mess hall was completed by 1950.

The name for Camp Pomponio came from a renegade Coast Miwok who was born circa 1799 with the name Lupugeyun, but was given the Spanish name Ponponio when he was baptized at Mission Dolores. (Pomponio is an alternate spelling.) He eventually fled the mission system and led a band of Native Americans that raided the ranches and missions in the area. He was captured and executed by the Spanish in 1824. When the Order of the Arrow, an honor camper society, was organized in San Mateo County Council in 1957, it naturally took the name of its home camp and was known as Pomponio Lodge #528.

Some of the traditions of Camp Pescadero transferred to the new camp, such as the troop formations on the parade ground and organization into companies. By the mid-1950’s however, Scouts were camping with their troops as is the practice today. Hiking, fishing, and nature study continued as well. Campers fondly remembered William B. “Uncle Bill” Platt and his nature hut in the building that later became the camp office. He was a knowledgeable Scouting enthusiast and was given the title of “Chief Scout.”

Unlike Camp Pescadero, Camp Pomponio was at the end of a long winding dirt road, so buses dropped off campers at Portola State Park where the camp staff met them and accompanied them on the 2-mile hike into camp.

In 1961, the San Mateo County Planning Commission prepared a study of its parks, recreation areas, and open space and initiated a plan to create a large regional park linking Memorial Park and Portola State Park. The plans included a dam across Pescadero Creek built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to create a new reservoir that would flood Camp Pomponio. The council entered into discussions with the
County of San Mateo for a possible land swap at a future lakeshore location at a higher elevation. After the 1962 summer camp season ended, the council leased Camp Pomponio to the county, with an option to extend or purchase after three years. Camping shifted to Camp Kit Carson at Caples Lake near Carson Pass and Camp Ed Barrer in the Sierra foothills near Avery, CA. Just months after the Scouts had moved out, the former camp was converted by the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office into an honor camp where inmates left during the day to work in the community. A medium security jail was added in 1969. The proposal for the dam ultimately fell through due to strong opposition from conservationists and the State of California that objected to hundreds of redwoods being flooded in Portola State Park.

Swimming pool at Camp Pomponio

Cutter Scout Reservation
With the loss of Camp Pomponio, Scouting leaders were still interested in securing a camp nearby, even though the council operated two Class A summer camps. They wanted something that was only 40-60 minutes away, open year-round, and that could serve as a training center for Scouts and leaders. The 240 acre central camp portion of Cutter Scout Reservation just to the north of Big Basin State Park was purchased in September 1968, and an additional 520 acres were obtained in May 1969.

Work at Cutter began with a massive building program in order to open for its first campers in early July 1970. The well and water tanks, A-frame ranger’s cabin, troop service building, and chapel were the first structures to go up. The swimming pool complex, archery range, and shooting range soon followed. All campers in that inaugural season received special “Cutter Pioneer” patches and Belmont Troop 377 had the honor of being the first troop to register. Although a manmade lake was in the original plans, Lake Gamlen (aka “What Lake?”) was not dug until 1975 due to challenges with permits and preparing the site to hold water. The Seabees helped in the construction of the lake at former campsite #4, first laying a rubber barrier and then covering it with dirt. The lake started to fill with water before the rubber was completely covered, and a favorite memory of the Scouts was when the bulldozer being used got too close to the edge of the water and slipped into the lake.
The camp was named in honor of William F. “Bill” Cutter, an ardent supporter of Scouting in San Mateo. A member of the executive board and Silver Beaver recipient, Cutter provided for Cutter Lodge at Camp Ed Barrer, the Cutter Room in the San Mateo Scouting Service Center (the original plaque is on display in the Pacific Skyline Council Foster City Service Center), and a modest scholarship for Eagle Scouts. He passed away in October 1967. Although he was blind and never saw the Scouts who benefitted from his generosity, it was said of Cutter that he had great vision for their future.

In the first few years, the camp kitchen was located in the troop service building and Scouts ate out-of-doors under dining flies. Harkson Lodge with its full service kitchen and sleeping quarters was built in 1974 with a grant from the Harkson Foundation and named in memory of Ulysses Severin Harkson, its benefactor.

Logging continued to have a presence at Cutter, with different sections of the camp property coming up for selective cutting over a 12 year cycle. The camp was divided into four tree harvesting units and logging operations took place every three years. Up to 25% of the timber was allowed to be taken during each harvest. The timber sales were a significant source of revenue for building and maintaining the camp. In 1992, the western 484 acres of the camp were sold to the State of California for future preservation. Half of the purchase price was paid for by Save-the-Redwoods and the Sempervirens Fund while the remaining amount was matched by the State of California with state park bond funds. The lands, hailed as “Butano Crossing,” were added to Butano State Park, although the Scouts retained access to it for hiking and outpost camping.

Over the years, many different programs have been implemented at Cutter Scout Reservation, such as BMX bicycles, high and low challenge COPE (Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience) ropes courses, and mountain boarding. The camp has served host to numerous Wood Badge and youth leadership training courses, and in 1990 was the site for Thang Tien III, the International Jamboree of Vietnamese Scouting (in exile). Today, Cutter Scout Reservation is still used by Cubs, Scouts, and Venturers of the Pacific Skyline Council for year-round camping and for the enjoyment of the beauty of the Santa Cruz Mountains that was such a prominent feature of both Camp Pescadero and Camp Pomponio in the past.

*The Pacific Skyline Council Camps Historic Trail is a project of the Scouting Heritage Committee. All photos and patches courtesy of David T. Miura.*
Pacific Skyline Council Camps Historic Trail Guide

Distance: approximately 12.4 mi.
Net elevation change: +1730 ft.
Map: Sempervirens Fund Map 1: Trail Map of the Santa Cruz Mountains
In parentheses: elevation and distance from last point

Starting at the Hoffman Creek Trailhead (elev. 270), cross the bridge over Hoffman Creek and follow the dirt Old Haul Road through a meadow and into a mixed forest of tan oaks, douglas fir and redwoods. The road rolls up and down until it crosses Piney Creek and reaches the Pomponio Trail junction (280-0.8). Turn left onto Pomponio trail and ford Pescadero Creek. Just after the ford, the trail marches uphill through an oak forest, making a right turn to grassy Worley Flat (300-0.4), then continues up the hill to an unnamed 4-way trail junction. Pomponio Trail continues down and to the right, through a series of long switchbacks past the Jones Gulch Trail junction into a lush redwood forest and the Brook Trail Loop junction. The trail traverses Grangers Bridge (270-0.7) over Towne Creek and climbs back uphill where it crosses a road (Jones Gulch Trail), then continues to another junction with the Brook Trail Loop at the Towne Fire Road (460-0.3). Forging ahead, the path switchbacks down to the Parke Gulch Road where the Pomponio Trail turns left onto the road. Follow the road until it peters out into a trail and passes by the Shaw Flat Trail junction (440-0.8) to the Shaw Flat Trail Camp. Proceed along the Pomponio Trail until reaching the Bravo Fire Road junction (640-0.7).

[Alternate Route: If you do not have a permit to enter the Sheriff’s Honor Camp, continue straight on Pomponio Trail above the camp to the Bear Ridge Trail junction (720-0.2). Stay on Pomponio Trail and head down the hill. The white roof of the medium security jail can be seen through the trees. A short series of switchbacks drops down to Camp Pomponio Road (320-0.9). Veer left at the intersection immediately past the gate across the trail before hitting the paved Camp Pomponio Road. If you go straight, you’ll still end up on the road. Turn left and cross the bridge over Tarwater Creek and walk up the road to the Pomponio Trail/Tarwater Loop Trail trailhead on the right (380-0.1).]

Turn right down the steep fire road into the Sheriff’s Honor Camp, staying to the right of the water tanks. You’ll pass the Honor Camp barracks on your left and eventually hit the pavement behind the kitchen and mess hall. Stay on the paved loop that circles around the barbeque picnic area, staff quarters and Visiting Office into the center of the Honor Camp, then turn downhill towards the sewage treatment plant at the intersection to the medium security facility up the hill. All of these buildings were built by the Sheriff’s Office for the Honor Camp inmates. The Honor Camp and jail were closed in 2003. During the Boy Scout days, this area was undeveloped and used primarily for troop camping. Turn right and head downhill towards the old Camp Pomponio office and the Camp Pomponio Road (360-0.5).

[Side trip: If you turn right at the old camp office and continue south along the paved road towards Pescadero Creek, you’ll see on the right the camp office building with the porch (aka Uncle Bill’s nature hut) and the warehouse nestled between the trees. This warehouse and the office are the only two buildings remaining from the old Camp Pomponio. On your left below the road is a level area which served as the parade grounds for flag assemblies. Continue straight to the swimming pool which is another recognizable feature of Camp Pomponio. Please use common sense and stay off of these decaying structures that have not been maintained for many years.]

Exit the camp by following the paved Camp Pomponio Road east to the Pomponio Trail junction. Cross the bridge over Tarwater Creek and walk up the road to the Pomponio Trail/Tarwater Loop Trail
trailhead on the right (380 -0.6). Tarwater Creek is so named because of the oil that seeps into it from the crude oil and natural gas deposits in this area. The trail parallels the road until it meets the dirt Tarwater Access Road. Turn right and follow the road towards Pescadero Creek, passing the Tarwater Loop Trail on the left. At a four-way junction (400-0.4), Pomponio Trail to Portola Redwoods State Park turns off to the left, the Tarwater Trail Camp is to the right, and the Bridge Trail to Old Haul Road is straight ahead. Go straight on the Bridge Trail and descend to the bridge crossing Pescadero Creek, then up the hill past the Snag Trail junction on the right (400-0.4) to Old Haul Road. This wide road was built by Boulder Creek timber baron Henry Middleton when this area was heavily logged during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Initially oxen teams used the road to haul the logs to nearby saw mills, and from 1930-1950, the Santa Cruz Lumber Company operated a railroad that moved logs along the grade to its mill at the headwaters of Pescadero Creek. If you look closely at the stumps of giant redwood trees, you’ll see notches for the planks that loggers stood on when cutting the trees down. Turn left onto the road and follow it for several hundred yards to the Butano Ridge Loop Trail junction on the right (470-0.4).

The trail climbs up a long set of switchbacks to the Portola Trail junction (1160-0.8) in a second growth mixed forest of redwoods, tan oak, toyon, and madrone. The trail continues uphill past some strange boulders with mini caves that look like they were along the banks of a long extinct stream. At the Basin Trail junction (1960-1.4), the Butano Ridge Loop Trail turns off to the right, but you will turn left and follow the Basin Trail to the Basin Trail easement at the boundary of Pescadero Creek County Park. The property you are entering is private land with only the trail easement allowing access to Big Basin State Park. Continue down the hill to a dirt logging road. Follow it to the right for about 100 yards where the Basin Trail picks up again on the left. Proceed uphill to another dirt road where the trail continues again on the opposite side. Note that there are several old logging roads that crisscross the trail, so it is important to pay attention to where you are walking. Some of them are blocked off only by logs or branches thrown across the road, so be wary if you step over any onto the wrong road. Keep an eye out for the orange easement boundary signs that will serve as signposts to the Basin Trail, although some of them have been broken away. After a short descent, you arrive at the end of the pavement of China Grade (2260-2.2).

Cross the road and pick up the trail towards Johansen Road. At the intersection of the Basin Trail with Hollow Tree Trail and Trail Camp Lane, take the right fork and head towards the Lane-Sunset Trail Camp. Pass through the trail camp and continue beyond campsite #6 and the pit latrine to descend to a curve in China Grade. Continue straight onto the dirt road to Cutter Scout Reservation, passing the Johansen Road junction (2260-0.8) and the Butano Fire Road junction. Use extreme caution for cars coming around a blind curve as this is an active road to camp. Walk on the left side of the road facing traffic and step to the side when cars approach. At the ranger’s cabin, turn left down the hill and up to the Harkson Lodge parking lot where the trail ends (2000-1.2).

Those wishing to make a round trip can simply retrace their steps, or take the Butano Ridge Loop Trail or Old Haul Road back to the Hoffman Creek Trailhead. While the Butano Ridge Trail (10.8 mi.) follows the ridge line, it goes up and down in elevation and doesn’t really offer any spectacular vistas since the view is obscured by the thick tree cover. The Old Haul Road (10.9 mi.) is flatter and winds in and out of the stream canyons in a redwood forest. If you decide to stay in one of the trail camps, make the necessary arrangements with the appropriate park. Contact Pacific Skyline Council for camping reservations at Cutter Scout Reservation. Cars may be left overnight in the Hoffman Creek Trailhead with a permit from the Memorial Park ranger station.
Optional Activity Sheet

1. Identify at least 5 different types of plants along the trail.

________________________  ________________________  ________________________
________________________  ________________________  ________________________

2. Identify at least 5 different types of trees along the trail.

________________________  ________________________  ________________________
________________________  ________________________  ________________________

3. Note any wildlife you see or hear.

________________________  ________________________  ________________________
________________________  ________________________  ________________________

4. Point out to your leader any evidence you see of past or present logging operations. Describe the purpose for those items in logging operations.

5. If an emergency happened along the trail, where would be the closest points to get help?

6. What is a “trail easement?”

7. What is the proper protocol when meeting a horse and rider on the trail?

8. What should you do if you encounter a mountain lion?

Other advancement opportunities:
Hiking merit badge
Backpacking merit badge
Bird Study merit badge
Fish and Wildlife Management merit badge
Forestry merit badge
Nature merit badge
Venturing Bronze Outdoor Award
Pacific Skyline Council Camps Historic Trail
Order Form

Only one trail medal may be purchased per person per trip for completing the trail. There is no limit to the number of patches that may be ordered.

List the names of hikers receiving trail medals.

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________

I certify that the above individuals have successfully completed the Pacific Skyline Council Camps Historic Trail.

_________________________  __________________________

Unit Leader          Unit Number

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Grand Total

*If shipping is desired, please indicate payment information and shipping address below. Contact the Pacific Skyline Council office for shipping costs.

VISA/MC        Account No. ___________________________  Exp. ____________

Signature: ___________________________

Name: ___________________________

Address: ___________________________

City: ___________________________  State: _____  Zip: ___________

Phone: ___________________________

Pacific Skyline Council, BSA
1150 Chess Drive
Foster City, CA 94404
650-341-5633
Fax: 650-341-4527

(Copy to Scouting Heritage Committee)