

PRESIDIO SELF-GUIDED HIKE

# Tennessee Hollow Watershed Walk



*Updated December 2020*

## Twelve Tales of Water in a Two Mile Trek

**A watershed is an area of land that catches rain and drains into a body of water.** Tennessee Hollow is the Presidio's largest watershed, encompassing 20 percent of the park. It begins with a natural spring, which is eventually fed by two joining creeks. The waters then flow north to Crissy Marsh through a variety of habitats where native plants, birds, and other wildlife thrive, and ultimately join the bay and ocean.

For centuries, people have used this creek system as a water source, beginning with the native Ohlone and later Spanish settlers. The U.S. Army substantially altered where and how it flows, pushing its waters underground in many areas in order to build on the land above.

This self-guided, two-mile walk traces a large section of the creek system where, for the past 15 years, restoration projects have brought habitats back to life. Along the way, you'll learn about some significant people and moments in Presidio history.

Note: this hike is moderate, with a variety of terrain. The loop takes approximately two hours.



## Walking Directions (map inside)

### 1 Thompson Reach *(start at the corner of Funston and Lincoln Avenues)*

More than a century ago the Army buried the creek here to use the land, first as a firing range and later for an Army hospital. The site is named after Dora Thompson, chief nurse at the former hospital on this site (find the sign about her). In the 1970s, these buildings were demolished and many tons of debris left behind. In 2005, the landfill was removed and the creek was brought back above ground -- the first section of creek in the Tennessee Hollow Watershed to be "daylighted" and restored. In the last decade, native plant diversity increased from five species to more than 100 species.

*Cross Girard Avenue and again at Lincoln. Turn left and then a quick right at the Tennessee Hollow Trail and stop at the wooden bench.*

### 2 YMCA Reach

Just a few years ago, you would have found yourself standing in the middle of a large parking lot at this site. Here too, the Army once channeled the creek's water into a pipe underground. In 2014, the pipe was removed and the water was brought back to the surface. Following the seasonal rains, water now flows through this area, which volunteers and staff restored with 16,000 native plants in 2015, including yerba buena, Indian paintbrush, and seep monkey flower.

*Continue south on the Tennessee Hollow Trail and cross Presidio Boulevard at the crosswalk. Continue south on MacArthur Boulevard sidewalk. Turn right at the Lovers' Lane boardwalk.*

### 3 MacArthur Meadow

More than a century ago, this was once a naturally wet meadow, where all three streams of the watershed came together. It was filled in by the Army so it could build here on dry land. Today, a seasonal wetland is being restored as a rich habitat for water-loving plants because the water is so close to the surface of the soil. In 2016, staff and volunteers planted 23,000 plants representing 60 species native to San Francisco.

### 4 Lovers' Lane Bridge

At the end of the boardwalk the historic brick bridge before you, part of the Lovers' Lane Trail, was built over the creek by the Army in 1885. The trail got its name because soldiers would stroll along this pathway on their way to romantic pursuits in "downtown" Lovers' Lane, which runs for one mile from the Main Post to Presidio Gate, is considered the oldest footpath in the Presidio. The boardwalk invites up-close observations of plants and wildlife in the wetland meadow. If it's fall or winter you may hear the loud voices of tiny Chorus frogs nearby.

*Backtrack to the sidewalk on MacArthur Avenue, turn right and walk along the meadow. When you arrive at the "Settlers of MacArthur Meadow" sign, cross the street and walk to the end of the residential area to El Polín Spring. Pause at the drinking fountain.*

### 5 El Polín Spring



The drinking water is tapped from another Presidio watershed that feeds Lobos Creek on the southwest corner of the park. Find the nearby manhole cover and you hear the creek water flowing below, awaiting its "daylighting." Today, much of the El Polín Spring area is in the midst of an ecological renaissance. It also has a rich history, told in part on the signs near the adobe walls. As you walk around the loop, be sure to find the source of the spring near the "Water of Life" sign. Peek

behind this sign to find a box with a log book!

*Return to the picnic area and turn left to walk up the stairway. Continue through the first trail juncture until you reach the Upper Ecology Trail beyond a redwood grove. Go left.*

### 6 Serpentine Grasslands

As you are winding up the trail, look to your left. Do you notice the change in habitat from the dense trees to open meadows? The hillsides here feature a rare California habitat, serpentine grasslands, that shelters at least one species found nowhere else on our planet in the wild, the Franciscan Manzanita. The Presidio Clarkia, an endangered wildflower, also finds home here. Green serpentine, our state rock, has naturally occurring heavy metals that are toxic to many plants. The native plants here have evolved to thrive in its harsh soils. These and other grasslands around the Bay Area naturally "brown" for the seasonal six-months of drought (May through October). They quickly green again with regular rains.



*Presidio  
Clarkia*

Continue uphill on the Ecology Trail (passing a sign with a Great Horned Owl). When the fence on the left ends, turn right to ascend the steps to the overlook.

## 7 Inspiration Point

From this view, scan the contours of the park and imagine how water would travel in a heavy rain storm, recharging the creek and spring you'll soon discover downhill. Where you see an athletic field today, in the late 1800s the U.S. Army built wells and other structures here to collect water for human use. Demand eventually exceeded the supply, and the Army abandoned this water source for the more prolific one at the Presidio's Lobos Creek. At the downstream edge of the ballfield to the east is the revival of the Tennessee Hollow Watershed's eastern stream.

When you're ready, return to Stop 6. Then continue on the upper Ecology Trail and walk about 5 minutes until you see a white gate on the right (at the bottom of the hill). Walk beyond the gate and stop at the large logs at the edge of the parking area.

## 8 The Western Stream (at Pop Hicks Playing Field)

There is a seasonal stream channel (out of view) on the right edge of the site. This is the western tributary of Petlenuc Creek. Pop Hicks Field was first built in 1955 as a Little League field and was named in honor of Master Sergeant Calus "Pop" Hicks, who served at the Presidio's Letterman Hospital and was instrumental in establishing youth recreation leagues in the Presidio. The Army built the playing field on top of a landfill of garbage and building debris. In 2011 this landfill was remediated to protect the nearby creek and make this site safe for a future athletic field.

Walk carefully along Barnard Street and turn left to ascend the stairs at Fernandez Street. Turn right to walk north on the Funston Street

Parkway created an opportunity to create 7-acres of new marshland at Quartermaster Reach. In late 2016, asphalt was removed from beneath the new parkway in the area in front of you. In 2020, an additional 850-foot length of marsh channel was returned to the surface creating new habitat for plants, fish, bird life and invertebrates such as the native Olympia oyster.

Continue walking towards the Bay. Cross Mason Street and make your way to the next footbridge crossing Crissy Field Marsh.

## 11 Crissy Marsh

Below your feet, the fresh water that flows through the Tennessee Hollow Watershed mixes with the salty waters of the bay, creating Crissy Marsh, a vibrant destination for more than 100 bird species including many who stop for food and rest as they make their long journey along the Pacific Flyway. It wasn't always this idyllic. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the marsh was filled in to make room for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition and later an airfield. Crissy Field's resurrection began in the late 1990s, when 40 acres of pavement were removed and wetland and dune habitats were recreated. Volunteers helped plant 100,000 plants representing 110 native species. Now Great Blue Herons and other spear-fishing birds grace the site daily with their presence.

Walk to the bridge over the mouth of Crissy Field Marsh facing the Bay (or on to the beach if you prefer!).

## 12 San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean

In addition to the Tennessee



sidewalk until it ends at Lincoln Boulevard. Turn left to use to crosswalk across Lincoln and walk along Halleck Street. Turn right after the second building and walk to the bridge.

### 9 The Narrows

At this site, the creek flows through a very narrow area with buildings on each side. The water in front of you is an accumulation of all three streams, seeping ground water, plus the salt water tide from Crissy Marsh. The water flows here can be very high in a storm event, so a channel was specially designed to manage the volume. The slopes along “the narrows” were planted in 2016. To get a sense of what it will look like in the future, look back at Thompson Reach south of the bridge.

At the other side of the bridge turn left and walk to the stoplight at the corner of Girard Road and Gorgas Avenue. Cross towards the Bay and walk to the footbridge.

### 10 Quartermaster Reach Marsh

The replacement of the Doyle Drive Highway with the redesigned Presidio

In addition to the Tennessee Hollow Watershed’s Petlenuc Creek, sixteen major California rivers drain into San Francisco Bay. Their comingled waters flow beneath the Golden Gate Bridge into the Pacific Ocean. This area has been an important resource for centuries, and features myriad habitats and species. It is a biodiversity hotspot identified nationally by the Nature Conservancy and internationally by Conservation International because of the diversity of geology, soils, waters, and vegetation habitats.



### LEGEND

- Petlenuc Creek
- Creek in Storm Drain or Concrete / Stone Channel
- Hiking Route
- Watershed Boundary
- Parking
- Trail (existing)
- Trail (Future or to be Improved)
- Restroom
- Stairs
- Foot Bridge
- Spring

## Thank you!

You’ve just explored a watershed in a dynamic state of change. These kinds of efforts are not unique to this national park site. Many cities around the planet are pursuing similar projects, large and small, to make a place for nature in our increasingly urban world.



## The Nature-Culture Connection

Chances are, just a few hundred years ago, your ancestors were living much closer to the land. The changing landscape of places all over the world is influenced by changing human needs and values.



Photos by Linda Yamane

The restoration of native plant communities in this watershed not only sustains our natural heritage, but also provides opportunities for renewal of ancient cultural practices. In the past, Ohlone people gathered plants from this watershed for many purposes, and today there is a designated ethnobotanical gathering site at Crissy Field marsh. If you return to the Presidio Officers' Club, look for this traditional basket on display in the Mesa Room. It was recently made by Ohlone descendant Linda Yamane using indigenous California plants similar to those being restored in the Presidio. Petlenuc Creek was recently named after an Ohlone seasonal village site that pre-dated European settlement in this watershed.

### Get Involved

The ecological restoration of this watershed is a community-based effort. Drop-in volunteer programs take place regularly. Activities include planting, invasive species removal and rare plant monitoring. For more information, visit [presidio.gov/volunteer](http://presidio.gov/volunteer). Please share any wildlife photos you captured on your walk today via the free community science app iNaturalist. Download from [inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org).



**iNaturalist**

To learn more about the Presidio's conservation efforts, visit [presidio.gov](http://presidio.gov). Share your favorite photos at [#PresidioSF](https://twitter.com/PresidioSF).