



A Museum of Trees

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San Francisco has a remarkable outdoor museum of trees chosen for their good manners. Good manners in a tree are not so different from good manners in a teenager. The well-behaved ones know their space and they stay in it.

These trees don't mar foundation walls or sidewalks. They keep their feet out of the plumbing and their heads out of the power lines. They don't spread food around to spoil, and they don't drop their their clothing (leaves) for someone else to pick up.

On these smoggy fall days, it's also nice to know that trees are the most consistent, if not the only effective, way to clean up the air; they are nature's green machines for digesting airborne bilge. You can come in out of the smog, as you might the rain, by standing under a big old tree.

Real-estate agents also will tell you that planting a well-chosen street tree in front of your house can add as much as \$5,000 to the home's resale value.

Whether you want to inspect this museum with an eye toward tree behavior or simply enjoy a pleasant autumn walk, the place to do it is in the 23-acre section of Golden Gate Park bounded by Fulton and Lake streets and Funston and 14th avenues.

When the land was purchased in 1903, at the unbelievably low price of \$360,000, it was described as including "several blocks of land, each block 600 feet long and 240 feet wide, or nearly one mile extending from the northern boundary line of Golden Gate Park to the south line of the military reservations, at a point not far from the old U.S. Marine Hospital."

Park commissioners cheerfully predicted, "The new boulevard running through the main body of the Richmond District from Golden Gate Park to the Presidio will open up a new field of park life."

It also opened up a desirable place to live on either side of the lush green strip - a bridle path for horsemen cantering from the park to the Presidio, a traffic chute and, more recently, the outdoor museum and test plot of street trees.

To explore Section 13 on foot, disembark from Muni No. 5 or No. 28 at Fulton Street and Funston Avenue. As you start walking north along Funston, notice how traffic noise and exhaust fumes seem to diminish as you approach the shelter of the fine old shady trees growing on the raised berm of earth of the eastern strip of boulevard.

Recently, residents of the vintage townhouses on either side of the boulevard made an effective protest when park gardeners began removing the noise-reducing understory of shrubs from the median strips.

The residents pointed out that when the boulevard was laid out, it had only two traffic lanes. Three lanes of concrete on either side used to be lawn.

The banished grass, like shrubs and trees, is also nature's own consumer of the hydrocarbons belched by cars. Approximately 100 trees are needed to consume the smog emitted by one car driving through San Francisco from the Golden Gate Bridge to the San Mateo County line.

Department of Public Works Assistant Superintendent Melvin Baker, who is in charge of urban forestry, estimates that the city has between 175,000 and 200,000 street trees. "But, we certainly need many more," he says.

Two ordinances passed in the past two years by the Board of Supervisors, one on urban forestry in 1986, the other on "adopt-a-tree" financing in 1988, are helping the cause.

It is possible to walk through the center part of the eastern boulevard on the old bridle path, but begin this walk along the west side of Funston Avenue. Here the demonstration plantings grow between the sidewalk and the street, and on the periphery of the berm. Some labels remain on the trees from when they were planted in 1971, as a joint project of San Francisco Beautiful, the city street-tree department and others.

At that time, the first trees planted were maytens, with two on one side of the sidewalk, and one on the other.

The next little clump was Chinese elm, reversing the pattern of three. They were followed by Victorian box, Indian laurel and the tree almost everyone recognizes for its huge glossy leaves, the southern magnolia.

Weeping bottlebrush, glossy and wax leaf privets, Brazilian pepper, Italian buckthorn and Grecian bay all are on the first block. Because they are living unprotected, the trees show homeowners and other tree-planters, better than any nursery could, how different varieties hold up in our climate through the years.

After you cross Cabrillo Street, there are five varieties to look for: the New Zealand Christmas tree, the Catalina ironwood, the Lily of the Valley, the Karo pittosporum and the Silver Queen pittosporum.

Walk 20 feet farther west in this block, into the older gnarled trees, and look along the red-rock bridle path that meanders gracefully through the east side of the park. Once much used by horsemen, it makes a fine promenade for walkers. Follow it north toward Mountain Lake, the Richmond District's choice historical spot.

A horseman friend told me that he used to pretend to be Juan Bautista de Anza, riding toward the night's encampment on the shores of Mountain Lake, when he came along this way.

Horsemen could ride the bridle path again as a way to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, he says, if only stoplights were coordinated at cross streets.

As you walk, it becomes apparent that the shade trees are planted in groups. One goes from a grove of contorted leptospermum or "tea trees," reeling and writhing and falling in coils, to stalwart soldierlike pines alongside graceful "manna gums" tossing their long limbs.

Plantings were designed to thrive within the variations of Presidio parkway microclimates, which differ from street to street and from one side of the street to the other.

Landmarks outside the forest as you walk north, are Sutro School, the classic columns of a Christian Science church and the Congregation Beth Shalom (west side of Clement Street and 14th Avenue). Congregation Anshey Sfard, which means Men of Spain, is also nearby. So are White Russian, French, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Lao, Korean, Slovakian and German colonies.

If it is an average day, especially on the major shopping streets of California, Geary and Clement streets, walkers will have to detour to stoplights to cross at corners. As you do, check out the nearby street trees.

Especially interesting near Cabrillo Street are two big Italian stone pines and the bronze-leafed dodonia.

There are shish kebab eucalyptus near Balboa Street. Near Anza Street, the big, naked gum trees are Eucalyptus viminalis. Monterey cypress near Geary Street are native Californians, as are the California pepper trees near Clement.

The original San Francisco Beautiful plantings continue on to Mountain Lake Park.

Like other parks in the city, and indeed other streets, Funston Avenue has been improved recently by their successors, the Friends of the Urban Forest.

The lively group's street-planting guide, "Trees for San Francisco," won a national award in 1985 from the American Society of Landscape Architects. Copies are available for \$6 each from San Francisco Friends of the Urban Forest, 512 Second Street, San Francisco 94107.

Linger as long as you like in Mountain Lake Park. When you are ready for more walking, return to Lake Street and turn west, crossing Park Presidio Boulevard to 14th Avenue with the light.

As you pass the western side of the green strip, notice how the bridle path that once approached the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital within the Presidio, along the western shore of Mountain Lake, has been "planted out" with grass.

Lush as these two boulevard plantings may seem, they don't compare with the many tree-planted boulevards of Beijing, where every street in the city has at least two double rows of street trees.

Major Beijing boulevards have as many as four green strips dividing automotive and bicycle traffic, each planted with four or five layers of trees of different heights, density and character.

Turn south and walk along the western side of the median planting strip, where two kinds of hawthorne, several tulip trees and the red-spotted gum tree are among the demonstration plantings.

Cross California and the variety is even greater, with pink tea trees, escallinias, evergreen pears and ornamental avocado trees.

Continue along the street side, enjoying the variety and benefits of these well-mannered trees as you walk.

Caption: PHOTO, MAP

The Park Presidio bridle path, once much used by horsemen, makes a fine promenade for walkers

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