

Touring the Sorich Creek Watershed

by Sam Wilson
2013

Sorich Creek is commanding a good deal of attention in the Ross Valley lately, due to a proposal to excavate San Anselmo's Memorial Park in order to form a detention basin that would temporarily impound the creek's flow at times when stormwater runoff threatens to flood downstream communities. Among tributaries to the Corte Madera Creek watershed, Sorich Creek is relatively small. But its effect during flood events is outsized, since it merges with San Anselmo Creek between the Nokomis Avenue and Madrone Avenue bridge crossings—amidst a particularly flood-prone neighborhood.

The headwaters of Sorich Creek, in the upper elevations of San Anselmo's Sorich Ranch Park, aren't far from its terminus—as the crow flies, not much over a mile. One could take a cursory look at the whole of it during an afternoon's walk. Hiking around the higher levels, however, requires stamina and a more serious time commitment.

Sorich Ranch Park is located at the end of San Francisco Blvd, and there are several trailheads that lead into steep, grassy hills. The trail with the best panoramic views is the newest, and is, as yet, unmarked. It starts outside the park, with wooden stairs set into the hillside, across the street from a house at 402 San Francisco Blvd. At the top of the stairway, bear left on a short stretch of pavement, then leftward again on a rocky dirt trail that's quite steep in parts of its ascent up the southwestern side of the valley. The surrounding terrain is largely grassy, so the view is generally unobstructed by higher-growing shrubs and trees.

Trailheads within the park lead into more heavily vegetated areas along the way to higher elevations in the complex of ridges and hills to the north and east of the valley. A trail that starts at the back of the parking lot wends through a dense growth of eucalyptus trees for much of the way. Two trails start at the back of an area that is frequented by off-leash dogs and their owners, to the west of the parking lot. One of the trails is closed for revegetation (as of this writing in late May). The other, the Dean Nyberg trail, leads part way up the ridge, through an area largely dominated by such chaparral species as coyote brush and live oak, to a rock formation known as Fort Rock.

Stormwater runoff arrives at the valley floor along two main seasonal stream channels. Both are currently dry, and both channels disappear into culverts as the ground levels out to the valley floor. The culvert entrance of the western tributary to Sorich Creek is readily visible as you approach the park, located across the road from a prominent "5 MPH" sign posted at the corner of San Anselmo's corporation yard, which occupies a swath of level land along the eastern side of the valley. The second tributary to Sorich Creek is culverted beneath the easternmost edge of the corporation yard.

The eastern border between the town's property and the adjoining private property is also the border between town and county jurisdiction; and the county is currently considering a proposal by the owners, Jerry and Mea Draper, to build six fairly closely-spaced 1500 sq. ft. homes at the base of the eastern slope of the valley. The Drapers are also residents of the Sorich neighborhood and small-scale organic farmers and



The eastern edge of the Sorich valley floor is dominated by San Anselmo's corporation yard. A tributary of Sorich Creek runs in a culvert on Town property, and also on adjacent private property, for which Jerry and Mea Draper have proposed a housing development. Story poles are visible in the photograph. Photo by Sam Wilson

beekeepers.

At the time of writing, story poles are indicating the placement of the proposed development, which would result in the alteration of about ten percent of the 10.6-acre Draper property. An agreement would also provide for “exhausting of development rights”—i.e., banning future development—at the higher elevations of the property.

The housing development provides a good opportunity for the Drapers and the Town to daylight 250 feet of culverted creek running across their properties—something Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed always advocates.

The two tributaries to Sorich Creek exit their culverts before merging, south of the corporation yard. Now a single channel, Sorich Creek continues to hug the eastern edge of the valley until it reaches a point at which it plunges into a culvert, beneath a roadway, then re-emerges on the other side behind a tall, heavily overgrown wooden fence.

Installation of the sub-roadway culvert was an ad hoc act by a property owner back in the 1960s. If you are one of those people who are fascinated by the sight of the reassertion of nature over human intrusion, it’s worth going out of your way to take a look at the upstream end of the culvert, which has been crushed by the embrace of the roots of a sizable willow tree perched above it. It is located about 40 yards beyond the point where the northern end of Los Angeles Boulevard is abruptly proclaimed on a sign that also informs the reader that the roadway beyond is a private drive, but that walkers and bikers are welcome to proceed.

Between the northern end of Los Angeles Boulevard and its southern end, near the Log Cabin in Memorial Park, Sorich Creek runs along an open but out-of-sight channel that is hidden in the backyards of the closely-spaced homes along San Francisco Blvd and Los Angeles Blvd. One can get a glimpse of it about halfway between the boulevards, through a hole in a chainlink fence on the north side of Santa Cruz Avenue.

In late May small pools here were the first sign of water I saw along the Sorich Creek channel.

Los Angeles Boulevard dead ends at its southern end near the Log Cabin, and Sorich Creek, which can be seen beyond a wooden fence, again enters a culvert beneath a driveway, and emerges on the other side in a channel that loops around the log cabin and enters another culvert, not appearing again until it emerges on the other side of Sir Francis Drake Blvd, now flowing in an open creek bed until it merges with San Anselmo Creek.

Any use of text or photographs for other than personal purposes is prohibited without permission from Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed P.O. Box 415, Larkspur, California 94977
info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.org