

Creek Viewing in the Upper Ross Valley

by Gerhard Epke

Corte Madera Creek and its tributaries meander discreetly through our neighborhoods. In many areas the creek is buried in pipes, sequestered in backyards, or concealed by thick vegetation for hundreds of feet. Fortunately there are still many beautiful places to access the waters, sense the riparian ecology, and view the various structures that influence the character of the watershed. This article, the first of a series, lists a number of those special places in the upper Ross Valley.

Sleepy Hollow Creek

1. San Domenico School This beautiful campus is at the headwaters of Sleepy Hollow Creek and has miles of hillside trails as well as great creek access. Visitor parking is just past the horse stables alongside the creek.

2. Sleepy Hollow Creek at The Alameda This quiet road follows the creek for a while and provides a steep access path to sedge-covered sand bars and bedrock visible under bay laurel trees.

3. Sleepy Hollow Creek at Drake High School This portion of the creek is squeezed into a narrow channel, but if you walk to the south side of the creek, near the footbridge, you can see the results of 15 years of restoration work by students and Charlie Kennard. Look for Friends' sign facing Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.



Sleepy Hollow Creek at the San Domenico School campus. Photo by Gary Leo

Fairfax Creek

4. White Hill School The school playing field is the location of a detention basin, but it is also a great access to a long native tree lined stretch of Fairfax Creek. Look for places where students working with Friends have been planting native species since 2005. Note: Access to the campus from Glen Drive is closed for the summer during construction.

5. Olema Road and Westbrae Dam Friends of Corte Madera Creek has been doing a restoration project in the area around 300 Olema Road and the native vegetation is thriving and providing nice habitat, visible through a chain-link fence. If you walk a few yards downstream and look into the creek across from the Fairfax town limit sign, you can see the Westbrae Dam. This structure may have been built to form a stock pond or swimming hole, and blocks any movement of fish upstream all year and downstream in the summer. If the big culvert at the mouth of Fairfax Creek is altered to allow steelhead upstream (and to reduce flooding in downtown Fairfax), this dam will get on the radar for removal.



Confluence of San Anselmo and Fairfax creeks. Photo by Charles Kennard

6. Peri Park Here, among tall redwoods, is some of the most accessible creek frontage in the watershed—for better and for worse, because it is heavily impacted by kids and dogs. One can walk up the creek for a few blocks, but in the downstream direction the creek disappears into a long tunnel before it joins San Anselmo Creek. Deep inside this tunnel is where legendary teenage mutant ninja turtles live.

San Anselmo Creek

7. Cascade Falls and the Elliott Nature Preserve At the end of Cascade Drive in Fairfax is a trailhead which provides access to the most picturesque headwaters of Corte Madera Creek. There are some quiet trails here that lead up to Cascade Falls. There is little car parking, so cycle to the trailhead.

8. Confluence of San Anselmo and Fairfax Creeks This vital intersection, always in deep shade, is difficult to access but you can glimpse it from two footbridges: the downstream footbridge is tucked at the end of Bridge Court; the upstream bridge is adjacent to 97 Dominga Ave.

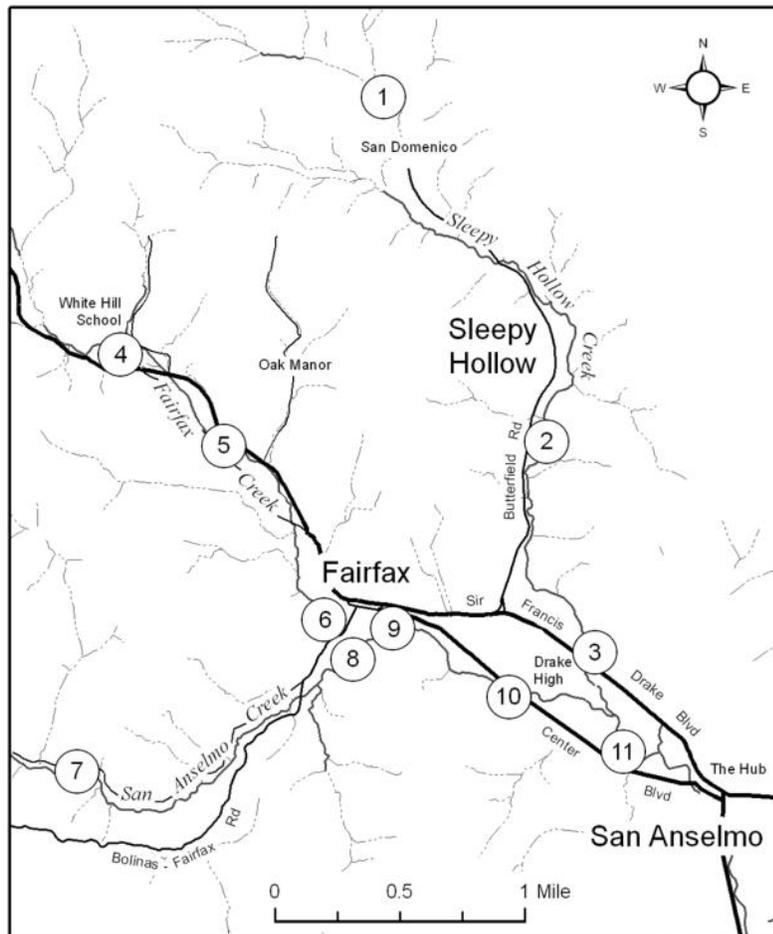
9. Pacheco Dam, and downstream, Pastori Bridge, on San Anselmo Creek These two features are both on Marin Town and County Club property, site of the former home of Lord Fairfax, and

of a formal and fatal duel in 1861. The private property as well as the creek can be clearly seen from public roads, from the walkway above the creek at the back of the Fair-Anselm Shopping Center, and from the parking lot between the shopping center and the Fairfax Post Office. The original mouth of Fairfax Creek is a gully behind the Fairfax Post Office: Fairfax Creek used to flow through downtown Fairfax, behind the Fairfax Theater, and along what is now Mono Street. When the culvert at Town Hall is overwhelmed, the water returns to its old course and floods downtown Fairfax.



*San Anselmo Creek in the Elliott Nature Preserve.
Photo by Gary Leo*

10. Lansdale Bridge Friends of Corte Madera Creek has been working with San Anselmo to build a fish ladder at the foot of the tunnel, construct baffles inside the culverts, and install native plants along its banks. To access the creek, take Forest Ave. up from the playground and turn right on Glen Road, and Creek Road to a flat parcel owned by the Town.



11. Saunders Bridge and the Drake High School Confluence

This bridge across San Anselmo Creek causes local flooding of parts of the Drake High School campus, Saunders Avenue, and Agatha Court. The fish ladder below the bridge is a steep-pass denil fish ladder, of the same design as those below Pastori Avenue and Canyon Road. These ladders were designed for Alaskan rivers, where salmon spawn when river flows are low. They work very poorly here, catching debris at every storm and can rarely be used by spawning steelhead. To fix both problems will require a new bridge. Friends has conceptual designs for both; all we need is the money to build them.

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