

TAKE A HIKE

by **Michael Holland**

Back in the 1990s I used to frequently run on the old service roads at the closed Hamilton Air Force Base. At least I thought it was closed. During one Sunday run I was “captured” by a military police car. The officer questioned me and then informed me that they were still landing two planes per day. I didn’t tell him that I sometimes ran on the runways. He escorted me off the air field—me running, him driving behind me.

WETLANDS RECLAMATION PROJECT

In 2001 the Corps of Engineers started the dismantling of runways, services buildings, and roads for the beginning of the Wetlands Reclamation Project. Signs on the upper levee road said completion was due in 2015. That seemed like a lifetime away; I would never have the chance to run on the new trails and fire roads. Yet here we are in 2014, and the project is essentially complete. The government finished ahead of schedule!

Not only do we have ample new wetlands, we also have some fabulous hiking, biking, and running

surfaces that offer several variations for the participant. I’d like to suggest three, and some post-hiking pleasures to make for a full day’s enjoyment.

OPTION ONE . SOUTH

The best place to start is on the levee road next to the YMCA in Hangar 5. For option one, go south down the road in a counter clockwise direction about one mile until you reach a viewing platform at the southernmost point of the wetlands. This flat, easy walk of two miles affords great views of the new marshes and the bay. While at the viewing platform, notice how unbelievably quiet it is. No traffic, no building, just the songs of the thousands of birds that have made these wetlands their home.

OPTION TWO . NORTH

For option two, head north up the road. If a seven-mile round-trip hike is your goal, take the road all the way around clockwise until it ends at the site of the breach. The breach is the spot where the levee wall



PHOTO: Erma Wheatley

South Bay Trail

was removed, thus allowing the bay to flow in and out. This is where the birds rule. On a recent run I was “escorted” back by a flock of sentinels who felt I was too close to their families and nest sites.

OPTION THREE . PACHECO POND

There is a third option. At the northernmost viewing platform, you’ll see a single-track trail heading

toward Bel Marin Keys. This is part of the Bay Trail. This out-and-back trail is next to Pacheco Pond, another favorite spot for birds.

Whichever option you choose, there is fun at the end of the hike. I suggest visiting the Hamilton Museum located on Hangar Drive across from the YMCA. The curators have done a terrific job of presenting equipment, photos, and mementos of life at the base in the ’40s and ’50s. It’s one of

the best small museums I’ve seen. It’s open Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday from noon to 4 PM.

My final suggestion on how to top off a great day is to grab a quick bite to eat at Cafe Joel. This small cafe is between Hangars 5 and 6 on the main walkway. The food is fresh, and the menu is surprisingly big. They are open weekdays from 9 AM to 3 PM.

Have a great time!

Just When

*despite the morning
sneers of crows
you’re hammer
and nails
trying
to carpenter up
a solemn poem
to set a-sail
on the high seas
of poems when
the great woodpecker
with his red cockade
who rarely comes
to your small
neighborhood
rows by your window*

laughing

Bill Noble