

Enjoying Our Area's Great Outdoors: Hikes; Picnic Lunches; Camaraderie; Inspiration Bay Area Older Adults and Santa Clara County Parks Transform Life After 50!

By [Susan C. Schena \(Patch Staff\)](#) January 10, 2015 at 9:20pm



[Bay Area Older Adults](#) (BAO) and [Santa Clara County \(SCC\) Parks](#) have partnered to offer hikes for adults age 50+ as part of BAO's preventative health program. Older adults constitute more than 30 percent of the population of Santa Clara County and increasingly suffer from chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and depression. Inspired by her grandparents' love of the outdoors and learning, former Silicon Valley biotech executive Dr. Anne Ferguson founded BAO to empower older adults to improve their physical and mental health and social well-being.

She explains "As we age and especially after retirement, it is critical to be physically active, develop new friendships and keep our minds stimulated. This is why every hike is two to four miles, has a unique educational component and a social picnic lunch."

One hiker, Jean, summarizes her experience: “joining BAO hikes one of my best decisions since retirement. The hikes are not just exercising the body, but also enriching my knowledge about the parks. I made new friends in BAO hikes who have the same passion as me for hiking. It inspires me to continue being active, that age is not an excuse. I even showed our group hiking pictures to my 84-year-old mom and encouraged her to join.” **Each hike is customized for older adults in terms of pace, terrain and elevation changes to make them accessible to as many seniors as possible.** As one senior mentioned “A bonus for me is that since we’re all older adults, the hikes are at a reasonable pace.” Another important aspect of the hikes is that many older adults would not hike alone, and BAO hikes give them the security and comfort of hiking with others.

Seniors motivate each other on the hikes, as Sally B. conveyed “Being with other people my age is inspiring--we may be older, but we are challenging ourselves to do more and push on.” Building new social relationships is overwhelmingly the most important aspect of the hikes to the seniors who participate. Because people can go at their own pace, they have time to chat as they walk. As one participant expressed “We experience the camaraderie of fellow hikers and engage in conversation with new acquaintances over lunch.” **The picnic lunches are an integral part of our hikes as it is a time for people to socialize while savoring the beauty of our county parks.** Togo’s has generously offered to be the picnic lunch sponsor for the 2015 hikes.

Heidi McFarland, SCC Park Interpretive Program Coordinator and an experienced park interpreter, is BAO’s indispensable hike leader and is highly appreciated by BAO hikers. Karen Hill, who has attended multiple hikes, says “Heidi is very knowledgeable, personable and adds another whole dimension to the experience.” As Heidi describes, “Partnering with Bay Area Older Adults has enabled us to increase the number of older adults on county park trails and gives them the confidence to return to the parks on their own. Since 2013, we had more than 800 adults age 50 to 85 on our hikes.”

The hikes are all over Santa Clara County, from as far south as Gilroy to as far north as Alviso. This gives seniors a chance to experience the diverse nature and history of SCC Parks including the waterfalls of Uvas Canyon County Park, the redwoods of Sanborn County Park, the mining history of Almaden Quicksilver County Park and the world’s smallest butterflies that breed at Alviso Marina County Park.

Please visit <http://www.bayareaolderadults.org/2015-bao-hikes> to learn more.

--Images courtesy of BAO.