



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Opening Mount Umunhum

Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve | Opening 2017



Mount Umunhum is a spectacular peak in the Santa Cruz mountain range with unique habitats, 360-degree views, an incredible cultural story, and opportunities for rich trail and nature experiences. This project restores the natural environment while opening the summit and surrounding area for people to enjoy healthy recreation and learn about the mountain's unique features — from its unusual wildflowers and trees to its fascinating cultural history both as a sacred site to the region's indigenous people and as a Cold War-era radar station.



C Schell

Since the region's earliest written records, this mountain has been called "Umunhum", which contains the root word for hummingbird in five different Ohlone languages. Hummingbird brought fire into the world through an act of great courage. Mount Umunhum is often referred to as "the resting place of Hummingbird."



Ken Hickman



Karl Gohl



Ken Hickman

The Vision for the Summit

Background

Located in the 18,000-acre Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve in Santa Clara County, Mount Umunhum, at 3,486-feet, is the fourth-highest peak in the Santa Cruz Mountains and features:

- Spectacular views that extend from the Monterey Peninsula to Mount Tamalpais and, on a clear day, the Sierra Nevada
- Plant communities ranging from gray pine forest and chaparral to the unique summit rock gardens
- Habitat that supports 324 native plant and animal species

This great peak has been tended for the last 10,000+ years by the region's native people, who continue to maintain an important spiritual and cultural connection with that mountain. In 1850, it was part of California's very first mining claim and was inhabited, explored and timbered extensively by settlers. In 1957, the summit was the site of the Almaden Air Force Station (1957-1980), one of dozens of radar stations in California that operated during the Cold War. Midpen purchased the 43-acre summit in 1986. In 2009, Midpen received \$3.2 million in federal funding to clean up the site and began a comprehensive public planning process to open the summit.

The People behind the Summit Project

During the 2.5-year planning phase, staff worked extensively to engage the public through public workshops and interviews with over 25 major stakeholder groups, including veterans, Native American tribal bands, neighbors, partner agencies, environmental groups, and others.

In addition, during its 18-month visioning process, Midpen gathered the input of thousands of local residents to develop the Vision Plan, a long-term regional vision for open space, which further refined and expanded the public vision for the summit.



Seven major public workshops were held to plan the future of the summit.



Sara Reid

Reconnecting Tribal Youth to the Land

The Amah Mutsun Land Trust (AMLT) Native Stewardship Corps program reconnects Amah Mutsun tribal members with traditional cultural practices, places, and knowledge. AMLT Native Stewards are one of the recipients of a Resource Management Grant awarded by Midpen for conducting research on District lands. As part of this grant, Tribal youth have been participating in an ethnobotanical survey and learning plant identification at Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. Through the Native Stewardship Corps, Tribal youth took a field trip to the summit of Mount Umunhum in order to reconnect with their cultural heritage.

Veterans celebrating the groundbreaking of the Bald Mountain Parking Area and trail, April 2014



Jack Geschmidt

Soaring and peak-loving birds such as golden eagles are frequent summit visitors



Beth Hamed

Volunteers work on the new Mount Umunhum trail



Carmen Lau

The Project Plan

The goal of this project is to create a financially sustainable nature destination that balances public access, enjoyment, and education with environmental restoration by:

- Providing an accessible and accommodating nature destination with site amenities and ample trails
- Removing hazards
- Highlighting the natural and cultural history of the site
- Restoring the landscape by re-establishing the natural topography and vegetation

Substantial financial support for this project comes from Measure AA, which was approved by voters in 2014 to support the Mount Umunhum Summit Project and 24 other major open space projects. In addition, the California Coastal Conservancy is providing \$1 million in funding.

Restoring Native Vegetation

Midpen is working with a team of soil scientists, restoration biologists, and the environmental nonprofit Acterra to rebuild a healthy and functional natural habitat on Mount Umunhum's summit:

- Over 2,000 plants will eventually be planted at the summit, grown from seeds collected in the Mount Umunhum area and propagated at Acterra's native plant nursery
- A native plant seed mix has been developed to help the mountain heal its 50-year old construction scars.

The future of Mount Umunhum is one of regeneration—returning the significantly altered mountaintop to its natural state, with native plants once again growing abundantly on the summit and creating a beautiful habitat that both animals and people can enjoy.

Lindley's blazing star is limited to a small range in California



Ken Hickman

The distinctive canyon liveforever thrives on exposed rocky outcrops



Ken Hickman

Mount Umunhum is a unique botanical melting pot of Outer and Inner Coast Range plants



Ken Hickman

Brewer's clarkia is a rare endemic flower found only on local Bay Area peaks



Ken Hickman

The rare gray dragon lubber is a flightless grasshopper found in rocky habitats



Ken Hickman



Frances Freyberg

Public Access and Outdoor Recreation



Frances Freyberg

Mount Umunhum Road connects Bald Mountain to the summit



Ken Hickman

The harmless California striped racer calls the mountain home



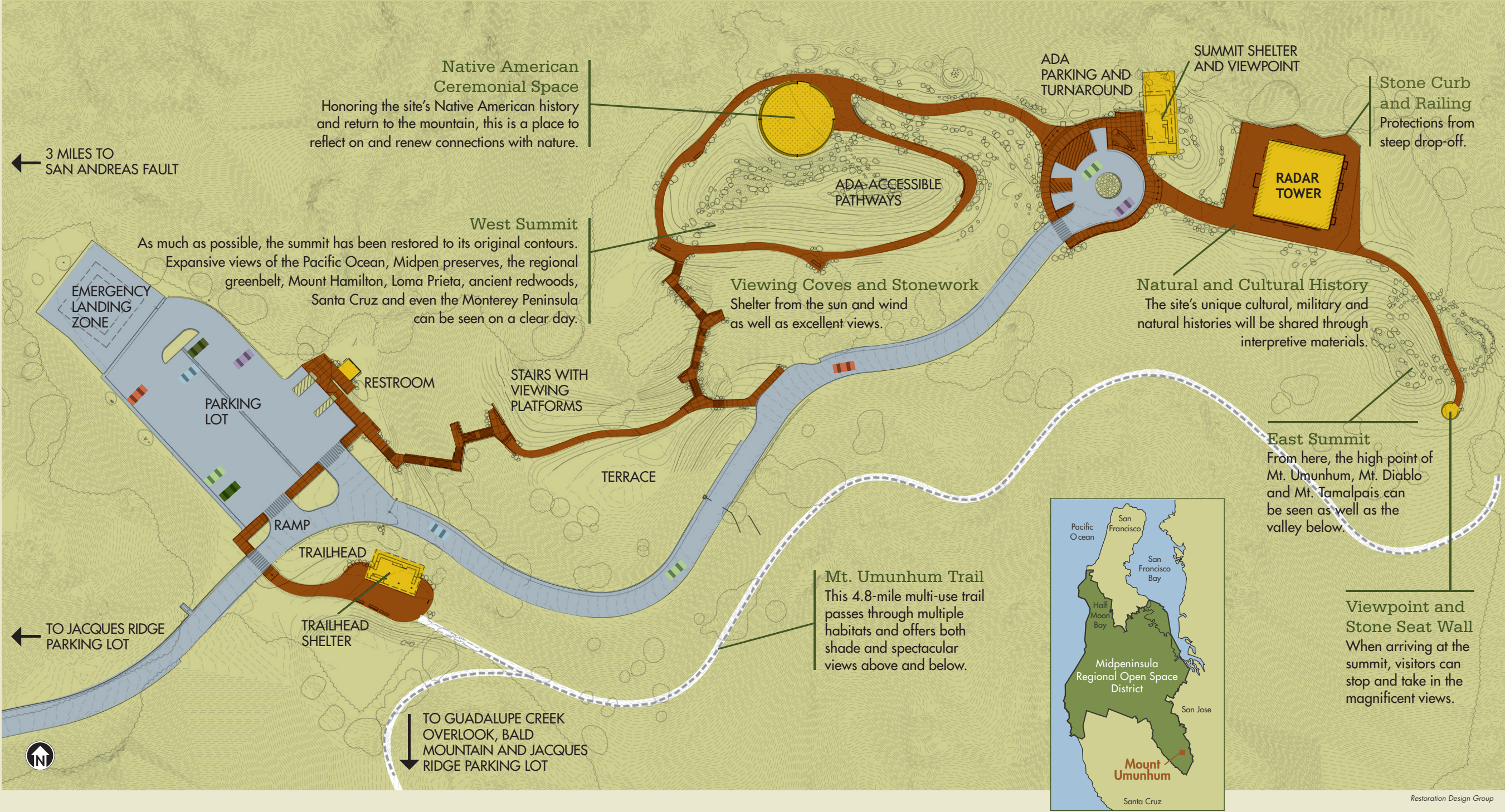
Karl Gohl

There are many ways to explore the new trail



Jack Garfield

A spectacular sunset



Restoration Design Group

Trails and Recreation

The gorgeous 4.8-mile Mount Umunhum Trail will extend from the Bald Mountain Parking Area (completed 2014) to the summit, crossing through the varied habitats of the mountain and offering incredible views of the valley below, the ridgelines above, and the other great peaks of the Bay Area. This multi-use trail offers easy-to-moderate terrain for hikers, bicyclists and horseback riders; and, at the summit, will be the highest point on the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Volunteer and docent activities will range from citizen science projects and trail patrol to interpretive hikes and activities.



Ken Hickman



Calm Delehanty



Noel Donovan

The Stories of the Mountain



Ken Hickman

Sickle leaf onion is a wild onion that thrives in rocky serpentine soils



Ken Hickman

Native Americans harvested seeds of the rare California nutmeg, a relic conifer from the dinosaur era



Hooked on Los Gatos—Library & Museum History Project

Settlers in Austrian Gulch (circa 1896) with a barrel of homemade wine from their community winery

The Natural World

For millions of years, Mount Umunhum has been shaped by the close proximity of the San Andreas fault system. The mountain's unique geology and low-nutrient serpentine soils are home to many rare native plants. Several creeks have headwaters that start on the mountain and multiple critical reservoirs are tucked into its foothills on all sides. Some of the mountain's most striking features are the exposed rocky summit and slopes, with jutting rock outcrops and scattered clusters of plants where cracks allow growth. These "rock gardens" host a stunning range of flowering plants and, as a result, the summit is a haven for numerous species of butterflies and birds.

The First Caretakers

Before this region was "Silicon Valley" and before it was the "Valley of Heart's Delight", this was home to one of the largest Native American population centers on the continent, with 70 diverse, healthy, economically-flourishing tribal units. For hundreds of generations, our region's indigenous people actively stewarded the land, increasing the health of the environment and its biodiversity. Today, they are sharing their knowledge and cultural practices with land managers who are working to repair and restore the land. Throughout their long history, Native Americans actively stewarded these lands using traditional practices such as:

- Planting the seeds of favorite useful plants close to settlements for easy harvest
- Pruning plants to produce better fruits, and straighter twigs and grasses for basket making
- Use of fire to prevent shrub encroachment on grasslands and increase the landscape productivity for hunting and plant collection

"Our people developed relationships with Mother Earth. It's a loving, caring relationship where we take care of Mother Earth and Mother Earth takes care of us."

—Valentin Lopez, Tribal Chairperson, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

Miners and Settlers

The contemporary history of Mount Umunhum is directly connected to the nearby New Almaden Quicksilver mining operations, which began in 1845. Five years later, this would be the site of California's first legal mining claim after statehood. It was discovered that the cinnabar pigment used by the Ohlone people contained mercury, also known as "quicksilver", which was essential for processing gold during California's Gold Rush. In 1870, "Austrian Gulch", situated on the southwest slopes of Mount Umunhum was settled by German and Austrian refugees of the Franco-Prussian War. Well known for their orchards and vineyards, this rugged community survived off the land for 60 years despite having to rebuild from fires and floods on multiple occasions.

Mount Umunhum Timeline



8,000 B.C.E–1770s: Native Americans inhabited the region and cared for the land



1769: First contact between Spanish explorers and native tribes



1850: Umunhum is part of the first legal mining claim filed in California



1850s: Hunters, sawyers and explorers looking for mineral resources explore the region extensively

1853: "Mount Umunhum" is officially named by Alexander Dallas Bache, Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey and Benjamin Franklin's great grandson

1870s-1930s: The southwest slopes leading to Austrian Gulch are settled by German and Austrian refugees

Military History

In the late 1950s, the United States government procured Mount Umunhum to build the Almaden Air Force Station, an early warning radar station that operated from 1957 to 1980. The station was constructed as part of the network of radar stations used to keep watch over our nation's airspace during the Cold War.

The radar tower on Mount Umunhum was one of a system of 23 similar stations in California and one of hundreds across the country that fed radar signals into the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) defense system. The summit has been closed since 1980. In 2009, with federal funding, Midpen removed 3,000 cubic yards of hazardous materials, including lead paint, asbestos, fuel storage containers and PCB transformers; and deconstructed 13,680 tons of concrete, asphalt, wood and other materials.



The Future of Mount Umunhum

Steve Abbors, General Manager

We're very proud that we'll soon open Mount Umunhum, an incredibly special place, to the public in 2017. With its clean crisp air, rock gardens, both Inner and Outer Coast Range plants and stunning views, it's clear why, for thousands of years, people have been drawn to this peak.

When visitors arrive, they will find a site that is ADA accessible and family friendly. They'll see California nutmegs, brought here by the land's first caretakers generations ago, rare plants and grasses that add to biodiversity, birds and butterflies, and brilliant drought-resistant wildflowers that last through the summer.

They'll read and hear the many human stories of the mountain—both Native American and military—as well as its geological and biological stories. They'll see hummingbirds who are drawn to the mountain along with other soaring birds. They'll be able to see the clean headwaters that feed into their drinking water and enjoy spectacular 360-degree views and do what people have done for millennia, come to this unique mountain to reflect on where we came from and where we are going.

We look forward to sharing this very special place and all of its stories with you.



Ken Hickman



Hummingbirds love scarlet beartongue flowers and the summit's abundant flowering plants

Ken Hickman



The gray fox is a top predator on the mountain

Ken Hickman



Hamilton fountain thistle and Loma Prieta leather root are both rare serpentine-loving plants

Ken Hickman



1957–1980: The Almaden Air Force Station is in operation, with the mission of defending California skies and shores during the Cold War

1986: District purchases 43-acre summit

1989: A 6.9 magnitude earthquake occurs at nearby Loma Prieta Peak, damaging the radar tower

2009: Federal funding obtained to clean up hazardous materials from former Air Force station

2012: Clean up and remediation work completed



2014: Bald Mountain Parking and Trail Area completed

Fall 2015: Guadalupe Creek Overlook completed



2016: The mountain is recountoured to a more natural state. Summit and interpretive plans complete. Work begins on road and summit facilities

2017: Summit opens to the public



About Midpen

Created by voter initiative in 1972, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has successfully protected more than 62,000 acres of open space. Midpen's mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically-sensitive public enjoyment and education. Currently, Midpen protects 90 rare native species in 26 unique preserves with over 220 miles of publicly-accessible trails. Preserves are open 365 days a year and are free to the public.

What is Open Space?

Open space is land that remains in or returns to its natural state and may also include ecologically-sensitive agricultural land. These lands not only protect areas of scenic beauty, they preserve the natural habitat that provides essential life support systems—removing air and water pollution, producing oxygen, and mitigating climate change. Open space offers opportunities for education, recreation, and renewal of spirit, and enhances a high quality of life.

Photo credits

Photo above: Frances Freyberg. Photographers for photos on timeline from left to right: Ray Cowan, Robin Goldthwaite, Midpen staff, Julie Perrucci, Frances Freyberg, Midpen staff, and David Weintraub.



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