

A Walk along Strawberry Creek on the UC Berkeley Campus

Susan Schwartz, President, Friends of Five Creeks

This walk focuses on the history, and architecture. Many thanks for information from Tim Pine, who heads campus creek-restoration efforts, ongoing since 1987.

From Oxford at Frank Schlessinger Way, take the trail along the south side of the creek, or take the walkway on the north side and cross at the first bridge. Follow rough trails near the recently restored junction of the North and South Forks in the Eucalyptus Grove west of Life Science Annex.

The private College of California, founded in Oakland in 1855, bought land here in 1860 largely because the creek's water supply. The land was gentle savannah broken by oaks, sycamores, and bays. Salmon and steelhead spawned in the creek -- the dwindling run hung on until the 1930s, when WPA projects culverted nearly all of the creek through Berkeley.

In 1866, the college commissioned a plan by Frederick Law Olmstead. He envisioned a park-like campus between the creeks, with an east-west axis and roads edging the outside of both forks. He designed Piedmont Avenue to attract wealthy residents to the area (then mostly dairy farms). These aspects of his plan survived the 1868 merger of the struggling private college with California's new land-grant college -- colleges that are one of the legacies of President Abraham Lincoln.

With two brick buildings completed, the University moved to Berkeley from Oakland in 1873. A small middle fork was culverted to build a running track, and the eucalyptus grove was planted to give the track a windbreak to the west.

Follow the south fork along Life Sciences Annex and cross to the rain garden in Dwinelle Lawn. This low area with rushes and other natives slows and purifies runoff from parking and walkways. Continue south to the creek, cross (note drains and channel structures), and follow the creek east between Dwinelle Annex (designed by John Galen Howard -- hereafter JGH -- 1920) and Alumni House (1954), and then alongside giant Dwinelle Hall (note grizzly bear statue), to Sather Gate (JGH 1913.)

In 1899, Phoebe Hearst, widow of the mining magnate and mother of the newspaper magnate, sponsored an international design contest for the campus. A Parisian architect won, but most influential in the end was the fourth-place finisher, John Galen Howard, trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He founded the university's school of architecture and was hired as campus architect. In his more than 20 years in the post, he designed some 20 buildings including Sather Tower (the campanile), the Greek Theater (1903), California Hall (1905), Hearst Mining (with Julia Morgan, 1907), Main Library (1917), Wheeler, LeConte, Durant, and more. He set the east-west axis that now is Campanile Way, and established the signature of neo-classical style carried out in white Sierra granite.

Telegraph Avenue originally ran to Sather Gate, which was the focus of campus demonstrations until Sproul Plaza was opened in 1961. It was named for Jane Sather, like Phoebe Hearst a wealthy widow who also made other major donations to the school. She objected to the nude males above the inscription "Erected by Jane K. Sather." They were not restored until 1987 -- with females, not males, above the inscription.

The meander and small amphitheater east of Sather Gate are recent. Note the giant high-flow-bypass tunnel leading behind the old powerhouse. Continuing on the south side of the creek past the old powerhouse (JGH 1904), you'll see 1936 WPA mosaics from its tour of duty as an art gallery. Loop behind Anthony Hall (Pelican Building, 1956, influenced by the aged Bernard Maybeck. Anthony donated it to house the humor magazine he founded as an undergrad in 1903. Anthony and Alumni House may be the main relics of a 1940s plan to fill most open areas with one-story buildings.)

Stop for the view at the first bridge west of Moses Hall (originally Eshleman Hall). Moses as well as Moderne Valley Life Sciences Building, Art Deco Edwards Stadium, castle-like Bowles Hall, and "Moorish" International House, were designed by George Kelham, JGH's eclectic successor. Kelham had designed San Francisco's old Main Library and Federal Reserve, but he didn't wield JGH's power, and Depression and war curbed building in the 1930s and 40s. East of Moses is romantic Stephens Hall, which bows to land contours, but re-routed the creek. Built in 1923, this was one of JGH's last before he was fired as campus architect. (He had objected to hiring Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan.)

Follow the creek east through Faculty Glade (Goodspeed Natural Area) past the north side of the Faculty Club (Bernard Maybeck, 1903). The "big inch" culvert, carrying most of the original creek drainage from upstream, increases the flow here. Continue past the log cabin (Senior Men's Hall, JGH 1906) to the west end of the Women's Faculty Club (Bernard Maybeck, 1903) and then continue uphill on the south side of the building before turning north again to the creek. The channel here looks oversized, because it now carries only a small amount of water from the "little inch" culvert.

Before the controversial stadium was built east of Gayley Road (JGH of course, 1923), a sharp bend in the creek and a striking waterfall marked the Hayward Fault there. The "little inch" at first carried the whole creek under the stadium and Gayley Road. But the fault has kept moving, requiring building of the "big inch" culvert and leaving the "little inch" mostly dry.

Rustic wooden Girton Hall (originally the Senior Women's Hall, Julia Morgan 1913) has been moved from northeast the Women's Faculty Club to the UC Botanical Garden. Renamed Julia Morgan Hall, it now houses garden events.

Heading back west, follow the north bank of the creek past the science and engineering complex that has mushroomed north and east from Gilman and LeConte Halls (JGH).

At the Campanile (Sather Tower, 301 ft., JGH 1913. Note the small bears – bears are engraved on the bell, too. Look down the Campanile Axis, JGH's white neoclassic axis except for the oldest building on campus:

Italianate brick South Hall, (1873), built for teaching sciences. North Hall, built for letters, was torn down in 1917. Bricks were made from clay the foot of University Avenue. Memories of the 1868 earthquake were fresh; the building has an iron frame and iron reinforcement.

Walk north through the campanile esplanade. The pollarded sycamores were transplanted from the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition. Stored under your feet are fossils from the museum of paleontology.

Continue northwest, passing the ornate Main (Doe) Library (JGH 1917) via Memorial Glade and Pool, passing the CV Starr East Asian Library (2008). The lowlands here at the foot of Observatory Hill were the first Botanical Garden, which moved uphill in the 1920s.

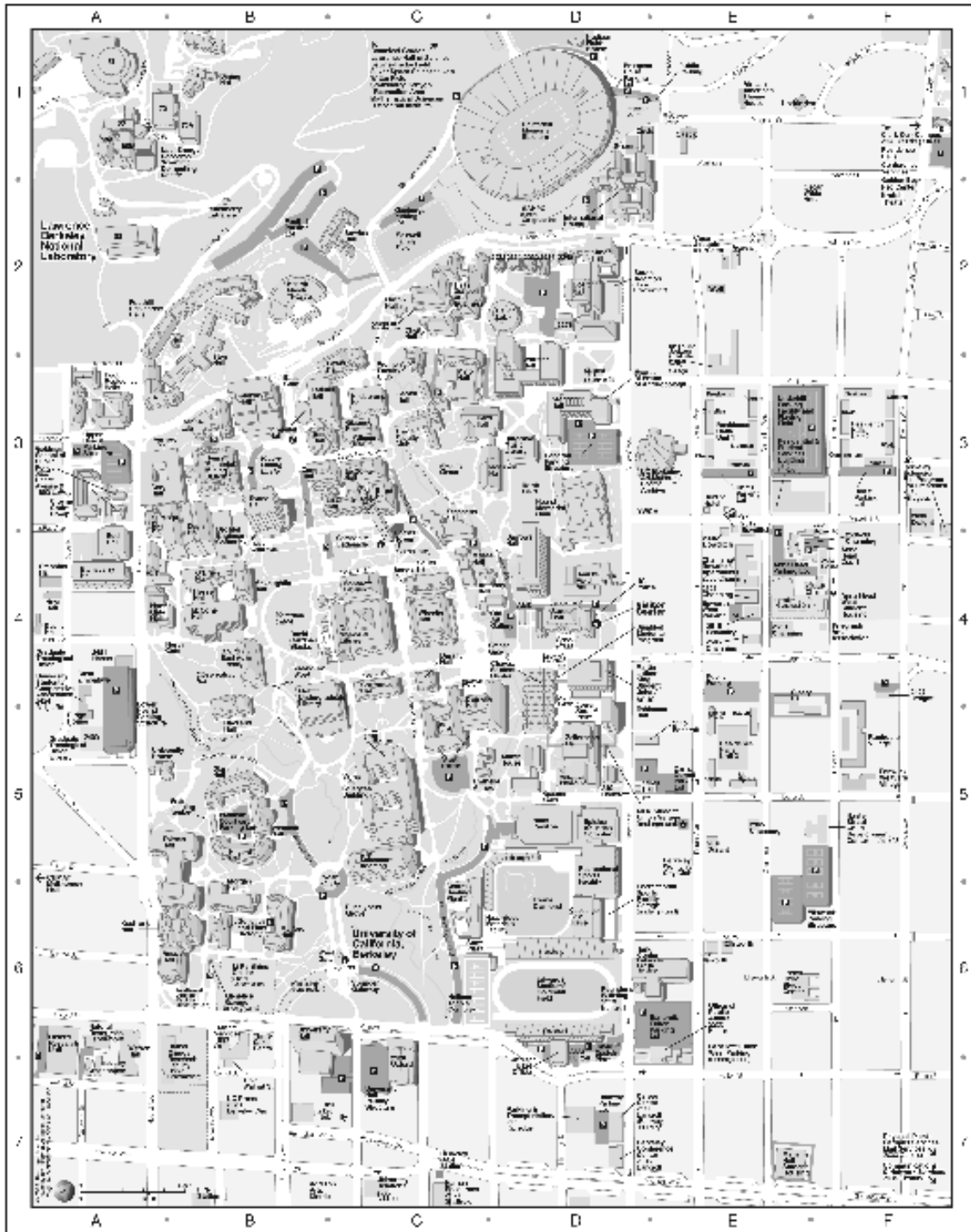
Continue to the North Fork at the Wickson Natural Area. Augmented by drainage piped from as far north as Rose Street, this branch enters campus from a culvert at Hearst and North Gate. This reach is the Wickson Natural Area.

Cross the creek at the first bridge, or if you feel energetic continue past Haviland Hall (JGH 1924) to the second bridge (steps and uphill climb on the other side). Continue to the north side of the complex edged by Wellman (JGH 1912), Hilgard (JGH 1917), and Giannini (William C. Hays 1930). Wellman Courtyard was redesigned in recent years to allow gatherings as well as parking. Spaces between pavers let some runoff soak into soil.

Head south between Wellman and Giannini. Just above the vehicle bridge is the outlet from the main campus storm drain, which carries runoff from many buildings including Stanley Hall, source of the Dec. 10, 2011, oil spill. Cross on the pedestrian bridge and follow North Fork downstream through meadow to the confluence at the Eucalyptus Grove.



UC BERKELEY CAMPUS MAP



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