

# Morning Sun Trail to GGRA Loop

**Overview:** Morning Sun trail to loop trail around Rodeo Valley in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. This 6.2 mile day hike is North of San Francisco, just across the Golden Gate Bridge. On clear days, it offers clean air and great views of San Francisco City and Bay, Alcatraz and Angel Islands. Looking West you get sweeping Pacific Ocean views even out to the Farallon Islands. Plenty of wildlife, in fact on January 3, 2009, the author of this guide spotted a Mountain Lion on the trail and had to retreat to an alternate trail (look on the map at right for the dead end stub that goes up the middle of the loop, that is where the big cat was spotted). Trail is easy to get to and can be cut short, via many side trails if you want a shorter hike.

**What to Bring:** Lightweight Hiking Shoes or Trail running shoes, Water, Powerbar type snacks, Camera with zoom, layers of light clothing, one lightweight waterproof outer layer (weather conditions can change quickly here), sunglasses if sunny. Trekking Poles would be helpful as there are some steep sections.

**How to get There:** US Highway 101 North over the Golden Gate Bridge to the Spencer Avenue Exit. Use the frontage road to get under the freeway. There is a parking lot in the cloverleaf of the freeway onramp. The Trail starts on the East side of the road.

**Route:** The Morning Sun Trail is a short series of uphill switchbacks over railroad timber stairs for the first quarter mile. It ends at the top of the canyon. It is a good warm up and gets the blood flowing. At the top take a rest and enjoy the views backward of Richardson Bay, Angel Island, Sausalito and other parts of the Bay.

From the top you intersect the Alta Trail and can choose to go left or right on the loop. Proceeding right (North) gives you a long slow downhill (from about 584 ft to 120 feet above sea level), while the left (South) trail gives you a level ridge walk with stunning early views of San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge towers and the Bay. We chose to go right so that we could 'earn' the views at the end of our hike.

Proceed Right and you will soon see a fork in the Trail leading toward the Ocean (you can see the Pacific on Clear days from most of the trail). That Trail is the Bobcat Trail – take it heading West. Partway down you will see a Rodeo Valley cutoff trail – it is a shortcut if you want a shorter hike. Proceed down the Bobcat Trail to a sign that says Rodeo Valley (left). That loops you around the outer edge of the loop trail portrayed on the map. You will come to a parking area along Bunker Road, and a fork in the trail. You will notice on the map – we first tried to take the shortcut trail (Rodeo Valley Trail) to the left – and that is where we ran into a mountain lion. It was a beautiful golden cat with a stunning long tail, it turned, froze, and stared at us when it first heard us. It beat a hasty retreat into the brush when we made noise. I only had a camera phone so could not get a photo. We elected to backtrack and proceed through the parking lot, across bunker road and use the ridge trail to avoid further encounters.

Across Bunker Road you see the well worn Coast trail – it is multiuse – Mtn. Bike, Horse and Hiker – so be alert some bikers proceed along at high speeds on this trail. The trail parallels Bunker road but higher on the canyon walls. Eventually, you cross McCullough Road and go UP. You will come to the intersection of the SCA trail. There is an interesting side trek that goes straight up to a knoll with great views – take it on clear days and enjoy. Return back to the SCA trail and head North this will take you back to the Alta Trail, the Morning Sun Trail and your car. Take your time - great views every few steps and some interesting homes along the SCA and Alta trails (one with a living grass roof).