

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name McDonald, Sam, Park **DRAFT**

Other names/site number: Sam McDonald Redwood Reserve

Name of related multiple property listing: African Americans in California MPDF

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 13435 Pescadero Creek Road

City or town: Loma Mar State: CA County: San Mateo

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** ___ **statewide** ___ **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ **A** ___ **B** ___ **C** ___ **D**

_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:	_____ Date
_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ Signature of commenting official:	_____ Date
_____ Title :	_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing
2

Noncontributing
3

buildings

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<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>12</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/conservation area

COMMERCE/professional

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION/outdoor recreation

LANDSCAPE/park

VACANT/NOT IN USE/single dwelling is in disrepair

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Cabin:

OTHER: Vernacular ranch style

Park Headquarters/Visitor's Center:

OTHER: Rustic modern park facilities

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Cabin

Foundation: Wood/posts, Masonry/piers

Walls: Wood/board-and-batten siding

Roof (historic): Asphalt/composite, Metal/corrugated steel

Roof (current): Asphalt/composite, Asphalt/composite over Metal/corrugated steel

Other: Chimney Brick

Park Headquarters/Visitor's Center

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Walls: Wood/board-and-batten siding
Roof (historic): Asphalt/composite
Roof (current): Asphalt/composite

Camp Restrooms

Walls: Concrete/rustic brick and breeze blocks
Roof (historic): Asphalt/composite
Roof (current): Asphalt/composite

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Sam McDonald Historic District is a 430-acre portion of a San Mateo County Park located in La Honda, California. The Sam McDonald Historic District comprises the natural landscape Mr. McDonald acquired for use as a nature reserve and a Vernacular style cabin located on the bank of Alpine Creek, both dating to Mr. McDonald's lifetime. In the last years of his life from 1954-1957 Mr. McDonald was working on a plan to develop his property as a "Stanford community and recreation park," with cabins and recreational facilities for adults and children, but the plan was set aside after his death in November, 1957. He bequeathed his La Honda property to Stanford University and in 1958 Stanford sold the property to San Mateo County for use as a public park. The park features such as tent camping sites, hiking trails, and a park headquarters constructed for the public opening of Sam McDonald County Park in 1970 are contributing resources. Significant landscape features include groves of redwood trees and Alpine Creek. Sam McDonald's Cabin is a contributing resource. All contributing features have integrity with a period of significance from 1919-1970. San Mateo County later acquired adjacent lands to enlarge Sam McDonald County Park and connect it to other County parks. The post-1970 park additions are outside the boundaries of Sam McDonald's 430-acre property and thus also outside the boundaries of the 430-acre Sam McDonald Historic District.

Narrative Description

Setting

African American conservationist and philanthropist Emanuel B. "Sam" McDonald acquired a series of contiguous properties in the Santa Cruz Mountains near the small settlement of La Honda between 1919 and his death in 1957. The forested property rises steeply from Alpine

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Creek and is dominated by groves of redwood trees. During Mr. McDonald's lifetime, visitors arrived at his cabin along La Honda Road and accessed the natural landscape features on old logging roads and informal foot paths. The narrow streamside terrace, the creek itself and the heavily wooded mountainside with its groves of redwood trees are character-defining features of the property.

Cabin – Exterior

Sam McDonald's Cabin is located at a corner of the property near La Honda Road. The Cabin site, located on the bank of Alpine Creek, is reached from La Honda Road by a one-lane unpaved road and a narrow bridge. The Cabin sits on the narrow streamside terrace below the wooded slope. The site also contains a garage added by San Mateo County Parks, two well houses of unknown age, a concrete slab that remains from the "Honeymoon Cottage" adjacent to the Cabin, and fragments of rustic board fencing. While currently overgrown, the landscape around the Cabin includes a huge redwood stump at the southwest corner of the house which Mr. McDonald incorporated as a garden feature in his landscaping.

The Cabin is a Vernacular ranch style dwelling, built by Mr. McDonald. It is a one-story rectangular wood-frame building, with a side-gabled roof and broad eaves and board-and-batten siding. The house is raised on wood posts and masonry piers and the entrances are reached by wooden steps.

The primary façade faces west and is roughly symmetrically centered on the front door with two windows flanking each side of the entrance. The front door is wood panel with a single panel below a large, glazed panel filled with four elongated diamond shaped panes. A shallow-pitched, side-gabled roof extends over the front entry supported by triangular braces. The windows on the west elevation are wide and cased with rustic board framing and protruding lower sills. Each window has a fixed lower sash of six lites and an operable hopper sash above with three lites. The brick fireplace chimney is visible, rising approximately five feet above the composition roof at the south end of the cabin. Siding has been removed under three of the windows exposing the building framing and the entry steps have been removed.

The north elevation of the Cabin faces La Honda Road. The living room and dining room sit below the gabled roof, each with a pair of windows of the same type as the front elevation: fixed lower sashes with hopper upper sashes and displaying nine lites (three over six). The living room windows on the northwest corner are cased separately while the dining rooms windows are framed together with a single sill. A small single lite casement window to the left of the dining room windows provides light to the kitchen pantry. A louvered attic vent sits under the peak of the gable. On the east side of the north façade a door with flanking windows leads into the flat-roofed enclosed porch, which extends along the entire east side of the house. The porch doorway has a wood paneled door exhibiting three panels below a screen panel. The windows on each side are formed by a single lite fixed sash with a pair of single lite casements above. The wood steps to the doorway have been removed.

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The east elevation is the enclosed back porch. Visibility is impaired by a fallen tree branch that has crushed a portion of the roof near the southwest corner. The east elevation fronts onto Alpine Creek and is located within twenty feet of the stream channel. The porch is enclosed with four bays of windows in an irregular arrangement. The first bay (moving left to right from the southeast corner) displays four fixed lite windows surmounted by three hopper windows; the second bay's windows have been destroyed by a falling tree limb, the third bay has six fixed panes (three-over-three) and the fourth bay exhibits the same configuration as the first with four fixed lites below and three hopper windows above. The sill height of the third bay (and possibly the second) is slightly lower than the first and fourth bays. The windows all extend to the eaves of the flat roof. The flat roof has corrugated metal roofing that was subsequently covered with composite roofing.

The south elevation is dominated by a large brick chimney with a stepped profile. The bricks are arranged in a simple running bond with occasional "clinker" brick accents. The fenestration is irregular with four wide, short hopper windows installed at varying heights, and a single square window with a three-lite hopper above a six lite fixed lower sash in the side gabled section of the house. Two of the windows flank the chimney and the other two flank the single square window. These windows are cased with wide boards and protruding sills similar to the north and west elevations. A louvered attic vent sits under the peak of the gable. At the southeast corner the enclosed porch doorway below the flat roof is obscured by plywood but appears to match the door and window configuration on the north elevation.

Alterations

The Cabin was altered several times by Mr. McDonald: the house was built in phases of indeterminate age of salvaged materials. The flat-roofed porch addition was at one point open, with a deck built over its roof. This porch was later enclosed by Mr. McDonald and the second story deck removed. The house at one point had an attached carport extending to the area currently occupied by the Garage. The carport was removed at an unknown date.

The Cabin has been "mothballed" with the addition of plywood covering the windows (from the interior) and doorways (the front door is covered from the interior; the porch doors are covered on the exterior). Some siding has been removed.

Cabin – Interior

The house is divided longitudinally in plan into three sections, each representing approximately one third of the footprint: the living room extends the full width of the house on the western side and the enclosed porch forms a single room on the eastern side. In the center of the house are a series of rooms: dining room, pantry, kitchen, bathroom, a single bedroom and two closets.

The front door opens into a long narrow living room that extends the entire width of the house. Walls and ceiling are redwood boards, and the floor is likely Douglas fir planking. The redwood boards on the walls are wider than the ceiling boards. Structural posts extend slightly from the walls, and a framed post and beam structure divides the room into two sections.

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A large brick fireplace is located at the southern end of the room. The central hearth is flanked by two smaller openings, one of which has a metal door, and both of which appear to have functioned as stoves or hearths. The brickwork employs a variety of decorative treatments achieved by laying bricks vertically at the bottom course and in the arch over the central hearth, on end in the center of the mantel and above the hearth openings, and at varying depths. A mosaic fragment is mortared into the brick centered above the main hearth. (This fragment was salvaged from the 1906 Earthquake rubble on the main Stanford University campus.)

There is a wood paneled closet at the side of the fireplace, closed by a folding door. This closet has a few coat hooks and what appears to be a home built small electrical device that combines a switch, a lightbulb and a bell, with an accompanying paper wiring diagram pasted to the wall. The purpose of this device is unknown.

Brass lighting fixtures that appear to be original remain in place and include pendant oil or kerosene lanterns and wall sconces. Electricity was added at unknown date and electrical conduit is surface mounted on the ceiling on the southern end of the room. Wood shutters are mounted on the interior of the windows flanking the fireplace.

The kitchen sits near the center of the house and is accessed through a large, cased opening from the living room. The walls of the kitchen are plaster and sheetrock above wood wainscot. Two pantries and a small dining room open off the kitchen on the north end, and there is a large wood paneled door to the enclosed porch. A window onto the enclosed porch sits to the right of this door. The ceiling is painted wood boards. The floor of the kitchen and dining room are covered with a matte brown sheeting tacked at the room's edges. The pantry has built-in cabinets and shelves which appear to be original.

The bedroom has plaster walls painted white and a white wood plank ceiling. Lit by a large square window and a smaller window set high into the wall just below the ceiling, this room has an electric ceiling light fixture (nonoriginal). The bathroom and closet open off the bedroom, with built-in cupboards flanking a narrow bathroom door. The bathroom has wood beadboard paneling, painted white.

Cabin Site Features

There is a detached garage adjacent to the Cabin that was added by Park Rangers sometime after 1970. It is a one-story, front gabled wood frame building with a concrete slab floor. It is clad in horizontal board siding with vertical boards in the eaves finished with a rustic scalloped lower edge. The Garage has three doors on the west elevation: a pair of carriage-style doors and a wide single door, all finished with the horizontal board siding. There is a small window on the north elevation near the northeast corner, with eight lites.

A small section of wood fence sits adjacent to the Garage. Typical of the surviving fences on the Cabin site, it is rustic in character and displays large wood posts (between six and eight inches on a side), horizontal rails of approximately four-by-six inches and irregular vertical boards.

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Behind the Garage lies the remnant foundation of the “Honeymoon Cottage.” This is a brick-framed concrete slab approximately ten feet wide and eighteen feet long.

There is a small pump house across the road from the Garage that is not associated with Sam McDonald. It is a simple wood shed clad in wide vertical boards with a flat roof, single door and a small window.

The other features of the Cabin Site include the road on the west side, and Alpine Creek on the east.

Park Features – Headquarters/Visitor’s Center

The main parking area and Park Office are located in the approximate center of the Park, where Pescadero Road makes a tight hairpin curve that surrounds the Headquarters area. This is the area where Mr. McDonald’s 1957 Camp McDonald sketch plan located the proposed store, dining hall and swimming pool. The Park Office building is a one-story wood frame building clad in vertical board-and-batten siding. The building has a side-gabled section containing two public restrooms and an end gabled section exhibiting seven fixed pane windows and a door to an office and exhibit space. The building was constructed in 1968 and is typical of rustic modern park facilities in the region.

Other park features in this area include the parking lot, a flagpole, three picnic areas, a storage shed, and two trailheads.

Park Feature – Youth Camps

A string of three Youth Camps are located along the road from the Cabin to the Headquarters area. This is the “West Cabin Area” on Mr. McDonald’s 1957 Camp McDonald sketch plan. Each camp contains a restroom building, tent sites, a picnic area, and a fire pit circle and could accommodate groups of up to 50 people. The camps are reached by Old Man Road and a hiking trail.

The three restroom buildings are identical: rustic concrete brick with concrete breeze blocks along the eaves for ventilation. Barbecues and picnic tables, trash enclosures, and rustic redwood log seating are typical of all three camps.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.)

A-ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

B-CONSERVATION, ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

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Period of Significance

1919-1970

Significant Dates

1919

1957

1970

Significant Person (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

McDonald, Emanuel Bruce "Sam"

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

McDonald, Emanuel Bruce "Sam"

San Mateo County, California

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Sam McDonald Historic District, located in San Mateo County, California, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B at the local level of significance in the areas of Conservation and Ethnic Heritage-Black, for its association with the prominent African American conservationist Emanuel B. "Sam" McDonald. The district's period of significance under Criterion B is 1919-1957.

The Sam McDonald Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level of significance in the area of Entertainment/Recreation. The period of significance under Criterion A is 1958-1970, from San Mateo County's acquisition of Sam McDonald's 430-acre property from Stanford University in 1958 until the dedication of Sam McDonald County Park in 1970.

The property's combined period of significance is 1919-1970. The Sam McDonald Historic District is nominated under cover of the *African Americans in California Multiple Property Document* under two historic context themes: Historic Context Theme *Making A Living* and the property type is the studio and office of a significant person; Historic Context Theme *Making A Life*, for a property associated with a significant person.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion B: Emanuel Bruce “Sam” McDonald

Biographical Background: From Monroe, Louisiana to Stanford University

Emanuel Bruce “Sam” McDonald (1884-1957) was born in Monroe, Louisiana. His mother, Priscilla Wheatley, was born into slavery in Louisiana in 1860, just before the Civil War. His father, Reverend Peter Bird McDonald, a Methodist minister, was born in Mississippi in 1858, the son of a freed enslaved man.

The McDonald family left Louisiana in 1890 to escape rising racial tension in the Jim Crow era and traveled across country to California by wagon. McDonald’s great-niece Leana Brunson McClain, a retired teacher, explained that “The McDonald family was part of the very early migration of African Americans out of the racist and segregated South. The McDonalds traveled west looking for a better life in a free state.”¹ Peter Bird McDonald worked as a farmer in Southern California and later in the Santa Clara Valley in Northern California. Emanuel McDonald completed the seventh grade in Gilroy and then left school to help with farm work, but he retained a lifelong commitment to education.

Emanuel McDonald acquired the nickname “Sam” in 1901 while working for ranch owner Fred Behm in Mayfield, a farm town founded in the 1850s that was annexed by the city of Palo Alto in 1925. Mr. Behm was a Swedish immigrant who had trouble pronouncing “Emanuel” and suggested “Sam” instead. Emanuel adopted his new nickname and kept it for the rest of his life. His extended family called him “Man” or “Uncle Man,” an abbreviation of Emanuel.

1. Leana Brunson McClain, personal communication with Marjorie Dobkin, January 8, 2025.

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In 1903 Sam McDonald worked as a teamster at Stanford University, hauling gravel by the wagonload to build roads on campus. After the 1906 earthquake he supervised Stanford student crews salvaging bricks from destroyed campus buildings. In 1908 he began work as Custodian of Athletic Fields in Stanford's Athletics Department. In 1923 he became Stanford's first Black superintendent when his job title was changed to Superintendent of Athletic Buildings and Grounds. He held that position until he retired in 1954 and lived in a campus apartment on the second floor of the Track House. The Track House is still extant although it was expanded in the 1980s.

McDonald was a beloved member of the Stanford community, best known for his devotion to the Stanford Home for Convalescent Children (Con Home) and his popular Labor Day barbecues during the annual Con Home Week of student fund raising and volunteer work. McDonald's memoir about his life at Stanford, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, was published by Stanford University Press in 1954. He donated all his book royalties to the Con Home.



McDonald, E. B. (Sam), *Stanford Historical Photograph Collection (SC1071)*, Dept. of Special Collections & University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
<https://purl.stanford.edu/zs458qq9872>

The *Stanford Daily* newspaper described McDonald as, “a father and friend to every member of the Stanford family – from the Stanford presidents ... down to the littlest children at the Con Home.”² McDonald was a bachelor who did not have children but he had a paternal devotion to Stanford students and said he felt extremely fortunate. “Because other people lose their children when they grow up, but my children come in an inexhaustible series. I have new children every year. And their children and grandchildren are my children too.”³

The Sam McDonald Property

Sam McDonald's property was located on the west bank of Alpine Creek in the coast redwood forest of the Santa Cruz Mountains in La Honda, San Mateo County. McDonald acquired his first plot of land in La Honda from Westley Bartley and Maurice Woodhams, Jr., real estate brokers from prominent La Honda families. McDonald was likely the first, or one of the first,

2. Barbara Tuerk, “Sam McDonald Says He's ‘Richest Man in the World,’” *Stanford Daily*, May 6, 1953, 1.
https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1953/05/06?page=1§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE11
3. Tuerk, “Sam McDonald Says He's ‘Richest Man in the World.’”

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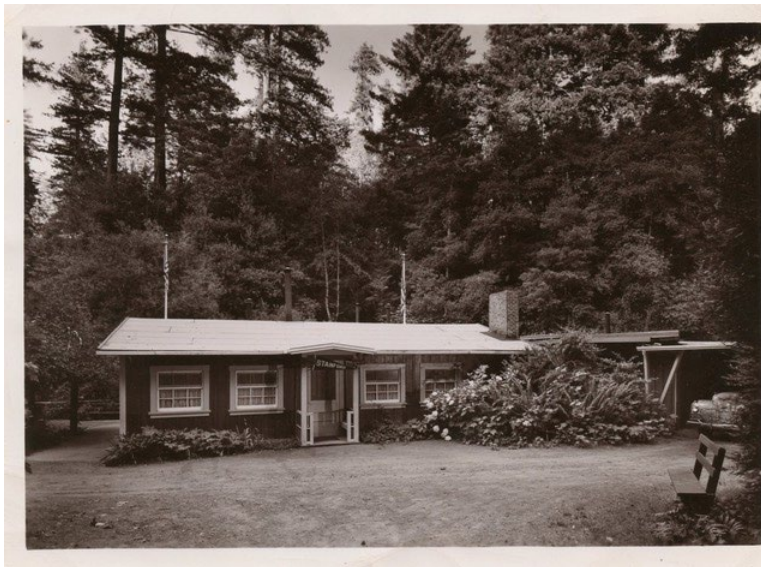
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African American property owners in the area, according to La Honda historian Bob Dougherty and Bob Emert, the first supervising ranger at Sam McDonald Park.⁴

McDonald built a cabin named Chee-Chee-Wa-Wa, and said it meant Little Squirrel in a Native American language.⁵ McDonald's great-niece emphasized that, "his mother Priscilla Wheatley was part Choctaw. My Uncle Man was very proud of his Native American heritage."⁶

The water service for Sam McDonald's cabin and several of his neighbors was provided by a small private water company, owned and operated by his real estate brokers Bartley and Woodhams. The water system property, including Alpine Creek springs, water tanks, pipelines, and pump houses, was foreclosed and acquired by the First National Bank of Redwood City during McDonald's ownership of the cabin. McDonald acquired the water system property from the bank, although the date is not known. McDonald also took over the management of the water system at the request of other water users.⁷



Chee-Chee-Wa-Wa historical photo of cabin exterior (undated).
San Mateo County Parks Department

McDonald built a dam in Alpine Creek to create a small pool named Lake Moqui. He chose the name in memory of a prominent woman from the Hopi Tribe in Arizona. He described Lake Moqui in his memoir:

Out upon my porch I stop to gaze at the waters of Lake Moqui ... The living waters leap over the Lake Moqui Dam and murmur incessantly in the whirlpool below ... This is the Alpine Creek, soon to merge into the La Honda Creek, from thence to begin the fame of the creek San Gregorio which flows to the sea.⁸

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4. Bob Dougherty, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, January 10, 2025; Bob Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024.
 5. Emanuel B. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences* (Stanford University Press, 1954), 257.
 6. McClain, personal communication with Marjorie Dobkin, January 8, 2025.
 7. Emanuel B. McDonald, "Letter to Water Users," January 2, 1957. (SC 0677). Stanford Vice-President For Business Affairs, Records. Box 38 Folder 8. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
 8. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, 357.

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McDonald also built a small outbuilding near his cabin called the Honeymoon Cottage, and offered it to newlywed Stanford couples. The cottage interior looked like a trolley car, with a rounded off ceiling. It was damaged by creek flooding in the winter of 1982-1983 and removed by the San Mateo County Parks Department.⁹

A Home Away from the Campus for McDonald and his Stanford Friends

Sam McDonald enjoyed the solitude and tranquility of his home in the redwood forest but he also entertained friends in La Honda.

McDonald used his La Honda property as an unofficial recreational site for Stanford University, where he worked in the Athletics Department. He hosted frequent barbecues, picnics, and club meetings for his wide circle of Stanford friends and associates including students, faculty, administrators, staff, and alumni.



Sam McDonald and friends in his cabin living room in 1935
San Mateo County Parks Department

In 1924 McDonald hosted his first annual La Honda barbecue for the former Graduate Managers of the Stanford Board of Athletic Control. In 1937 McDonald expanded the invitation list to include ex-presidents of the Stanford student body. McDonald also hosted barbecues for the football, track, and baseball squads, the families of the Athletic Department staff,¹⁰ and meetings of the Stanford Board of Athletic Control.¹¹

9. Don Curran, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, September 20, 2024.

10. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, 273-274, 284.

11. "B.A.C. Meeting," *Stanford Daily*, October 18, 1933, 4.

https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1933/10/18?page=4§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE57

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In 1939 McDonald initiated and hosted his first annual La Honda barbecue for Stanford legacy students, the children of Stanford alumni. The barbecue was attended by about seventy students and fifty members of the faculty and administration including Stanford president Ray Lyman Wilbur and his wife.¹² President Wilbur competed in a horseshoe contest. Former Stanford Business Manager and Comptroller Almon E. Roth played leap frog. During the Second World War the annual barbecue was held on the Stanford campus but returned to Sam McDonald's property in La Honda in 1946.¹³ In 1948 the barbecue was sponsored by a new Stanford organization, SDSA, Sons and Daughters of Stanford Alumni.¹⁴



Sam McDonald and friends in his cabin living room in 1935
San Mateo County Parks Department

McDonald Family Visits to La Honda

McDonald's extended family from Santa Monica visited him in La Honda every summer. His great-niece, Leana Brunson McClain, has fond memories of falling asleep in the cabin's screened-in porch to the sounds of Alpine Creek running during the night. She remembers her great-uncle as a very gentle and quiet man who loved caring for his family and cooking steak and other meals for them in his small cabin kitchen. He was a great storyteller who shared Native American folklore and played his concertina as she sat on the floor by the fireplace. He took her on long walks in the redwoods, inspiring her with his knowledge and love of the forest. She recalls that "As I think back on those special walks, I realize now that Uncle Man was teaching me about the beauty of the redwood forest."¹⁵ With his height of 6 feet 4 inches, he seemed as tall as the forest trees when she was a child. Mrs. McClain visited her great-uncle's cabin in 2015, after an absence of more than fifty years. She experienced a "flood of family memories" when she walked into the living room and the screened-in porch. She recalled, "How cozy the cabin was and how much family love once filled this cozy space. It reminded me of so many happy and treasured memories on our visits to Chee-Chee-Wa-Wa."¹⁶

12. "Faculty, Students, Attend Barbecue," *Stanford Daily*, May 22, 1939,1.

https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1939/05/22?page=1§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE18

13. "Alumni's Sons, Daughters Hold Barbecue At La Honda May 26," *Stanford Daily*, May 13, 1946, 2.

https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1946/05/13?page=2§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE31

14. "Club Plans Barbecue," *Stanford Daily*, May 12, 1948, 5.

https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1948/05/12?page=5§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE41

15. McClain, personal communication with Marjorie Dobkin, November 21, 2024.

16. McClain, personal communication with Marjorie Dobkin, November 21, 2024.

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McDonald's Forest Home in "Nature's Sanctuary"

I have spoken now and again of my lodge Chee-Chee-Wa-Wa in the redwood forests of La Honda. This has been my home away from the campus for the past thirty-four years, and, the season permitting, I have journeyed there after a day's work that I might rest and work and meditate and pray in the seclusion of nature's sanctuary.¹⁷

McDonald had a great reverence for the redwoods and called them "the lords of the forest."¹⁸ McDonald's fervent description of his 1917 camping trip in the Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Santa Cruz County, California suggests that Big Basin may have inspired his move to La Honda in 1919. He recalled that "We were possessed with inspiration and awe to behold the most colossal among all those lords of the forest through which we had passed ... Truly these lords are among the most wondrous things the Creator hath wrought."¹⁹

McDonald gradually acquired more prime forest property along Alpine Creek, first from Bartley and Woodhams or the Bartley Realty Company and later from other owners including a logging firm, the Doxsee Company. By 1948 McDonald had acquired 430 acres of steep, rugged redwood forest, the full extent of his La Honda property. The area he acquired had a long history of logging dating back to the late 1870s.²⁰

McDonald protected and maintained his forest property as a redwood reserve and game and wildlife refuge that he called the La Honda-Alpine-Ytaioa Reserve. He may have seen the name Ytaioa in William Henry Hudson's popular 1904 novel, *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest*, which featured a mountain called Ytaioa.²¹

The letterhead of McDonald's stationery for the La Honda-Alpine-Ytaioa Reserve had photographic images of the redwoods in Big Basin, Butano, and La Honda and also noted his memberships in Save the Redwoods League and the California Academy of Sciences.²²

McDonald was a minister's son and a deeply religious man who found sanctuary in the redwood forest. He told Billy Prior, a friend in La Honda, about his dream of building a little church in the redwoods. She noted that "He never got around to doing it, in his busy life helping others." He showed her a place in the redwoods that he called The Cathedral "which he regarded most reverently."²³

17. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, 366.

18. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, 241.

19. McDonald, *Sam McDonald's Farm: Stanford Reminiscences*, 241-242.

20. County of San Mateo Department of Parks and Recreation, *Sam McDonald County Park Concept Plan*, September 1974,4.

21. William Henry Hudson, *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (Duckworth & Co.,1904), 31.

22. McDonald, "Letter to Alf Brandin," Stanford Vice-President for Business Affairs. April 9, 1957. (SC 0677). Stanford Vice-President For Business Affairs, Records. Box 38 Folder 8. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

23. Billy Prior, *Tales of Old La Honda*, (Self-published memoir, n.d.), 29.
https://lahonda.typepad.com/files/tales_of_old_la_honda.pdf

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McDonald's book editor Holly Hansen Ceideburg, Stanford Class of 1940, described a "most memorable" visit to La Honda with her husband. McDonald invited them to visit one Sunday morning at 8 A.M., to have breakfast and go to church, and he asked them to "get all dressed up" for the occasion. "We thought we were going to the church in town," she recalled:

Sam said, we'll take his car [a 1931 Model A Ford]. We got in the car and drove up and up and up to the ridge on one of these old roads. He called it the Ytaioa Ridge. We got out, me in my high heels, and walked up to this circle of redwoods. There were twelve redwoods and he called it his cathedral. The whole forest was his aggregation of lords but this particular circle of redwoods were his disciples. There were twelve of them and they all had names. There were Peter and John and James and Andrew. He had them all figured out. The room was about twelve feet in diameter ... He told us to just to stand there, the three of us. And Sam took off his hat and very solemnly read a passage from the Bible. And then without any warning he threw back his head and sang at the top of his lungs, three verses of, I think it was Rock of Ages. Then he gave a long and very nice benediction. Then he put his hat back on and we all got in the car and went back to his house and he fixed us a lumberjack breakfast.²⁴

Billy Prior, who continued to visit McDonald's Cathedral after his death, recalled that it "lost its privacy" during the development of Sam McDonald County Park when a park trail was cut right through the middle of his beloved circle of redwoods.²⁵

Retired San Mateo County Park ranger Bob Emert believes that McDonald's redwoods Cathedral may be located right across from the park headquarters parking lot.²⁶

"Camp McDonald," Sam McDonald's 1957 Plan for a Stanford Community and Park

After his retirement from Stanford in 1954 McDonald considered future plans for his forest property in La Honda and the evolution of his ideas was reported in the *Stanford Daily*. In May, 1954 McDonald said, "I've got to do something with my 400 acres up at La Honda that will benefit Stanford people and the Convalescent Home."²⁷

24. Holly Ceideburg, Interview with Holly Ceideburg: Stanford Oral History Project Interviews, April 17, 1982, Tape 2:24:20 (SC 1017), Producer, Stanford Historical Society. Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif. <https://purl.stanford.edu/sj209mr1461>

25. Prior, *Tales of Old La Honda*, 29.

26. Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024.

27. Pete Grothe, "Bull Session," *Stanford Daily*, May 12, 1954, 2.
https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1954/05/12?page=2§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE26

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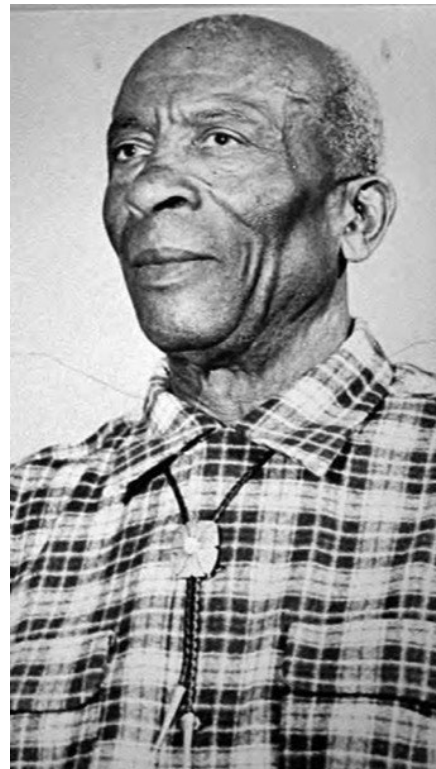
While considering plans for his La Honda property, McDonald gave the Sierra Club permission to use his redwood forest for hiking classes.²⁸

In April, 1955 McDonald told the *Stanford Daily* that “One of the things that’s been keeping me busy is a project I have up in La Honda now. I’ve got quite a number of acres up there – it’s a game and wildlife refuge. I’m working on the plan of getting Stanford supporters to form a little community there. It wouldn’t be restricted to Stanford people.”²⁹ McDonald planned to use Native American names for the different sections of his proposed community in La Honda.

McDonald’s plans for a Stanford community in La Honda were delayed by a diabetic condition that led to amputation of both of his legs.³⁰

In 1957 McDonald pursued a plan to develop his La Honda property as a “Stanford community and recreation park.” He sought the support of Stanford friends including Alf Brandin, the Stanford Vice-President for Business Affairs.³¹ By May, 1957 McDonald’s ideas for his La Honda property began to coalesce around plans for a Stanford community campground for picnics, parties, and overnight camping.³²

McDonald sought to formalize his park vision of a “Stanford community and recreation park” with a Preliminary Sketch plan entitled “Camp McDonald,” dated August 19, 1957 and prepared by civil engineer Lawrence G. Brian. The plan’s features included a West Cabin Area with twenty-four small cabins, an area with a lodge, a store, and a community dining hall, and a Recreation Area with a tots’ play area, a pool, and a section for games including horseshoes and



Sam McDonald (undated)
(PAHA 6506)
Palo Alto Historical Association

28. Sallyanne Durr, “Value of Friendship: Sam McDonald Lived Two Lives-Both Fruitful,” *Stanford Daily*, November 5, 1957, 2.
https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1957/11/05?page=2§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE18
29. Barry Anderson, “Enthusiastic As Ever: Sam McDonald Comments On His Year of Retirement,” *Stanford Daily*, April 27, 1955, 2.
https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1955/04/27?page=2§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE29
30. Logan Pazdral, “Sam McDonald Doing Well After Leg Amputation,” *Stanford Daily*, October 28, 1955, 1.
https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1955/10/28?page=1§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE15
Durr, “Sam McDonald Sees Life Differently After Illness,” *Stanford Daily*, May 7, 1957, 4. https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1957/05/07?page=4§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE33
31. McDonald, “Letter to Alf Brandin,” Stanford Vice-President for Business Affairs, April 9, 1957, (SC 0677) Stanford Vice-President For Business Affairs, Records, Box 38 Folder 8, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
32. Durr, “Sam McDonald Sees Life Differently After Illness,” *Stanford Daily*, May 7, 1957, 4. https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1957/05/07?page=4§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE33

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tennis. Most of the property was designated as “Area for Future Development.”³³ Alf Brandin reviewed the engineer’s plan and wrote an encouraging letter to McDonald, emphasizing that “I think you will find it what you had in mind and very interesting.”³⁴

McDonald’s vision for Camp McDonald drew upon his tradition of Stanford parties, picnics, and barbecues at his La Honda property. The Camp McDonald plan may also have been inspired by the popularity of the University of California’s family camp in the Sierra Nevada, Lair of the Golden Bear. It was established in 1949 and thrived during the postwar family boom of the 1950s.³⁵ McDonald had many contacts with U.C. Berkeley (Cal) through his former employment in the Stanford Athletics Department.

Sam McDonald’s Death and Property Bequest to Stanford University in 1957

Sam McDonald’s plan for Camp McDonald in La Honda was set aside after he died of a heart condition on November 4, 1957. *The Stanford Daily* reported the news of his death in several articles, including one with a sub-headline, “‘Stanford Legend’ Spent 51 Years Under All 5 University Presidents.”³⁶

McDonald bequeathed the bulk of his estate, including his 430-acre La Honda property, to Stanford, designating two beneficiaries: one third of the estate to the Stanford Home for Convalescent Children and two thirds to the Stanford University Trustees.³⁷

McDonald’s extended family thought it was “kind of a shock” that he left his La Honda property to Stanford, instead of to family members, according to his great-niece, Leana Brunson McClain. She added that, “As we settled into what happened, it just showed how much Stanford meant to him and that Stanford was his family as much as we were his family.”³⁸

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33. Lawrence G. Brian, Civil Engineer, “Camp McDonald: Preliminary Sketch,” August 19, 1957 (SC 0677), Stanford Vice-President For Business Affairs, Records, Box 38 Folder 8, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
 34. Alf Brandin, “Letter to Sam McDonald. August 23, 1957,” (SC 0677), Stanford Vice-President For Business Affairs, Records, Box 38 Folder 8, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
 35. Cal Alumni Association U.C. Berkeley, “The Lair of the Golden Bear History and Culture, 2025.” <https://alumni.berkeley.edu/camp-at-the-lair/lair-history-and-culture/>.
 36. Durr, “Sam M’Donald Dies of Heart Ailment: ‘Stanford Legend’ Spent 51 Years Under All 5 University Presidents,” *Stanford Daily*, November 5, 1957, 1. https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1957/11/05?page=1§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE1
 37. County of San Mateo Superior Court, “Will of E.B. McDonald,” Recorded December 6, 1957, Vol. 37 pages 522-526, No. 25215; “Stanford Gets Aide’s Estate,” *San Mateo Times*, November 20, 1957,4. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1957/11-20/page-4;> “SU, Con Home, Get McDonald’s Estate,” *Stanford Daily*, November 21,1957,1. https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1957/11/21?page=1§ion=MODSMD_ARTICLE18
 38. McClain, Videotape Conversation with Robert Gelb, May 31, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuxR2aIE4iM>

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Mrs. McClain is very proud of her great-uncle’s “forward-thinking legacy as an environmentalist”³⁹ for his stewardship of the redwood forest property during his lifetime and for the benefit of future generations.

Criterion B Conclusion

The Sam McDonald Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion B in the areas of Conservation and Ethnic Heritage/Black for its association with the prominent African American conservationist Emanuel Bruce “Sam” McDonald. McDonald’s most significant legacy in the area of conservation is his namesake park, Sam McDonald County Park.

McDonald acquired his first small plot of land in La Honda in 1919. He gradually acquired 430 acres of coast redwood forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains and protected and maintained it as a redwood reserve and game and wildlife refuge that he called the La Honda-Alpine-Ytaioa Reserve.

In August, 1957 he had preliminary plans to develop his La Honda property as Camp McDonald, a Stanford community and recreation park primarily – but not exclusively – for people at Stanford University, where he worked from 1903-1954.

McDonald died in November, 1957 before implementing his Camp McDonald plan. He bequeathed his forest property and cabin to Stanford University Trustees and the Stanford Home for Convalescent Children.

In 1958 Stanford sold McDonald’s 430-acre property to San Mateo County for use as a public park. Sam McDonald County Park was dedicated in his name and opened to the public in 1970, thus fulfilling McDonald’s vision of his redwood forest property becoming a park. This story will be told in the following narrative statement of significance under Criterion A.

Sam McDonald County Park represents the “redwood legacy of Sam McDonald,” according to Garrison Frost, former Director of Communications at Save the Redwoods League. Frost believes that, “What makes this park unique among others in the region is its origin and the role played by its namesake, an African American man from Louisiana who became something of a legend in the Stanford University community.”⁴⁰

Nik Rau, an author at Peninsula Open Space Trust, visited the Sam McDonald Cabin in 2021 to celebrate Black History Month and honor Sam McDonald. He believes that McDonald’s “incredible life story is worth telling again and again. He achieved many ‘firsts’ for a Black person in the Bay Area, and his story represents a major milestone in the conservation movement.”⁴¹

39. McClain, Conversation with Katherine Wright and Robert Cala (San Mateo County Parks), July 19, 2023.

40. Garrison Frost, “The Redwood Legacy of Sam McDonald,” *Save the Redwoods League*, February 10, 2021. <https://www.savetheredwoods.org/blog/the-redwood-legacy-of-sam-mcdonald/>

41. Nik Rau, “A Legacy of Generosity- Remembering Sam McDonald,” *Peninsula Open Space Trust* (POST), February 1, 2021. <https://openspacetrust.org/blog/sam-mcdonald/>

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Criterion A: Sam McDonald Property Becomes San Mateo County Park 1958-1970

San Mateo County Acquisition of McDonald Property in 1958 for a Public Park

As noted above, Sam McDonald died in 1957 and bequeathed his 430-acre forest property in La Honda, including his cabin, to Stanford University. In September, 1958 Stanford University sold the 430-acre Sam McDonald property to San Mateo County for \$67,000, for use as a county park.⁴²

Stanford had reportedly, “found it uneconomical to develop” the McDonald property, and “sold it to San Mateo County at a far lower amount than its actual worth, provided that it be named for the former university official.”⁴³

Almon E. Roth, the executor of McDonald’s estate and a former Stanford Business Manager and Comptroller, managed Stanford’s property negotiations with San Mateo County. It was Roth who suggested that the proposed park be named “Sam McDonald Park.”⁴⁴ County Supervisors indicated their support for Roth’s suggestion in November, 1958.⁴⁵

San Mateo County’s 1958 acquisition of Sam McDonald’s former 430-acre La Honda property gave new life to McDonald’s vision of his beloved forest property as a park for future generations.

San Mateo County’s Park Development in the 1960s

San Mateo County honored Sam McDonald’s conservation and park legacy while developing a county park that was different from the preliminary Camp McDonald plan that he had prepared in 1957. He had envisioned a Stanford community and recreation park as a university family camp with residential cabins, a community dining hall, a lodge, store, and recreation facilities for both adults and children. By contrast, Sam McDonald County Park was dedicated in 1970 as a public park for youth group backpacking and overnight tent camping in three rustic campsites. The park program in 1970 focused on children – scouts, school children, and members of summer youth programs.

42. County of San Mateo Superior Court, “Estate Case Summary, E.B. McDonald, Also Known as “Sam McDonald,” Estate Case Summary No. 25215, 1957-1959; “McDonald Land Sold To County,” *San Mateo Times*, September 29, 1958, 2. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1958/09-29/page-2>

43. “La Honda Park To Open,” *San Mateo Times*, May 14, 1970, 24. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1970/05-14/page-24>

44. “McDonald Park Buy Cleared,” *San Mateo Times*, August 21, 1958, 19. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1958/08-21/page-19>

45. “County gets \$18,776 Refund For Its Low Accident Record,” *San Mateo Times*, November 6, 1958, 10. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1958/11-06/page-10>

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San Mateo County developed Sam McDonald Park for public use in the 1960s, with intensive development starting in the late 1960s when county funding was available.⁴⁶

According to Henry P. Tarratt, San Mateo County director of building construction and general services, the county intended to keep Sam McDonald County Park in its natural state as much as possible.⁴⁷

Tarratt offered a brief progress report on Sam McDonald County Park development in August, 1968. The park headquarters building was under construction. The County Board of Supervisors had received bids for construction of three restrooms and called for bids for road construction and development of a parking area adjacent to the headquarters.⁴⁸

The park headquarters building was designed by architects in the San Mateo County general services department and built with the help of minimum security prisoners from San Mateo County's Honor Camp near La Honda. Restrooms were designed and built by county contractors. Campgrounds were built by county park rangers and Honor Camp prisoners.⁴⁹

San Mateo County park rangers who helped develop McDonald's property as a park in the 1960s did not find any evidence that he had built campgrounds or formal forest trails, but they did find traces of "social trails" dating from McDonald's lifetime. County park rangers and Honor Camp prisoners cut trees and scouted and hacked out trails with picks and shovels.⁵⁰ Retired county park ranger Bob Emert recalled that "we followed the old social trails where we could."⁵¹

One of the Honor Camp prisoners who briefly worked at Sam McDonald Park in 1967 was the novelist and essayist Ken Kesey, who had a house in La Honda near Sam McDonald's cabin in the 1960s. Kesey was at the Honor Camp while serving a five-month sentence for marijuana possession.⁵²

Developed Areas of Sam McDonald County Park in 1970

46. "Outdoor Facilities Increase," *San Mateo Times*, June 14, 1962, 40. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1962/06-14/page-40>; "Prepare For New Park," *San Mateo Times*, August 7, 1968, 54. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1968/08-07/page-54>; Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024.
47. "Prepare For New Park," *San Mateo Times*, August 7, 1968, 54. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1968/08-07/page-54>
48. "Prepare For New Park," *San Mateo Times*, August 7, 1968, 54. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1968/08-07/page-54>
49. Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024.
50. Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024; Tom O'Connor, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 4, 2024.
51. Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024
52. "Full Term For Kesey," *San Mateo Times*, November 9, 1967, 28. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com/san-mateo-times/1967-11-09/page-28/>; Kinney, Aaron, "San Mateo County Sheriff's Camp That Once Held Ken Kesey Could Become Campground," *San Jose Mercury News*, October 23, 2012, updated August 13, 2016. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2012/10/23/san-mateo-county-sheriffs-camp-that-once-held-ken-kesey-could-become-campground/>

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The Sam McDonald County Park Concept Plan of 1974 describes the new, developed areas of the park circa 1970:

There are four developed areas of the park. There are the Headquarters Area, consisting of a headquarters building, a small maintenance shed, and a paved, open area for parking. Access to this Headquarters Area is from Pescadero Road. The other three areas are the youth group camp sites, known as Choctaw, Modoc, and Chinook. Each of these areas are designed to handle groups of from 30 to 50 youths. Facilities include a restroom, picnic tables, and barbeque pits, arranged for group participation. Open areas are also provided for activities and sleeping ... All three of these areas are accessible by trail only, and are intended as walk-in sites. A service road exists to each area so that one vehicle per group is enabled to bring in necessary supplies and gear required for the group in general, and emergency vehicles can be accommodated. Sewage disposal is by septic tank and leach line, and water is supplied to all sites.”⁵³

Sam McDonald’s cabin was used as a county park ranger residence from the 1960s until the winter of 1998, when the cabin site was damaged by devastating El Niño floods.⁵⁴ The first park ranger who lived in the cabin maintained McDonald’s water system. San Mateo County operated and maintained Sam McDonald’s water system from 1958 until the early 1990s when the county installed a new system.⁵⁵

Car-Free Park as a New Concept in 1970

Sam McDonald County Park was formally dedicated in Sam McDonald’s memory on August 27, 1970, although the park’s three campsites had already been open for about three months.

Youth group overnight camping was the main land use of the park when it opened in 1970. Campers hiked into the three campsites from the parking lot near the park headquarters. Family picnic areas were provided near the headquarters for people dropping off or picking up the campers.⁵⁶

The *San Mateo Times* described the car-free park as, “a new concept in county parks.”⁵⁷ Walt Wright, reporting on the dedication of Sam McDonald County Park in August, 1970, noted that the concept of a car-free park was also a new trend in national and state parks in 1970:

In most camping parks there is more asphalt paving than bare ground. It’s the place where cars go camping. But park use and design theories are beginning to change, as

53. County of San Mateo Department of Parks and Recreation, *Sam McDonald County Park Concept Plan*, September 1974, 9-10.

54. Don Curran, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, September 20, 2024; Steve Durkin, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, September 28, 2024.

55. Curran, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, September 20, 2024.

56. County of San Mateo Department of Parks and Recreation, *Sam McDonald County Park Concept Plan*, September 1974, 1,9.

57. “La Honda Park To Open,” *San Mateo Times*, May 14, 1970, 24. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1970/05-14/page-24>

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evidenced by the ban on cars in portions of Yosemite and the ‘cluster’ camp design of some new state parks.⁵⁸

Too Steep To Be a Traditional Park

Bob Emert, the first supervising county park ranger at Sam McDonald County Park, believed that the park was “too steep to be a traditional park. Our program was to provide a successful first and second experience in backpacking.”⁵⁹ The park program was a practical adaptation to the park’s steep forest terrain but was also inspired by the popularity of scout camping at the time.⁶⁰

Ralph Shaw, San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Director, emphasized that, ‘We’re not going to let this place get crowded.’⁶¹ Jack Brook, the County Parks Assistant Director, explained that Sam McDonald Park was not a traditional park because the rough and steep terrain, with only a few scattered flat areas, made it difficult to develop a traditional park with picnic areas and parking spots. He said, “We are afraid if we did, it would become only an overflow park used only when the other parks are full.”⁶² Brook emphasized that a program of rugged, primitive camping seemed a natural fit for the park. Youth groups had expressed interest in a place to camp in a completely natural area, with minimal supplies, a source of water and a campfire site.

Youth Group Camping Program

As the first supervising ranger at Sam McDonald County Park, Bob Emert was responsible for establishing rules for park visitor access to the Chinook, Choctaw, and Modoc Youth Campgrounds. He denied access to a Stanford University fraternity after explaining the program’s focus on scouts, schools, and summer youth programs:

Emert already has had a few problems making the new policy clear. “There was a fraternity from Stanford and their spokesman was a law student and he had answers for every rule I had. I said it had to be a youth group. And he said many of the fraternity brothers were youths, and I said it had to have adult supervision and he said many of

58. Walt Wright, “Final Wish Of A Black Man: New Park For the Young,” *Redwood City Tribune*, August 22, 1970, 2.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/842925932/?match=1&terms=%22Sam%20McDonald%20Park%22>

59. Bob Emert, quoted in Michael Svanevik and Shirley Burgett, *San Mateo County Parks: A Remarkable Story Of Extraordinary Places and the People Who Built Them*, San Mateo County Parks Foundation, January 1, 2001, 78-79.

60. Emert, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 10, 2024.

61. Walt Wright, “Final Wish Of A Black Man: New Park For the Young,” *Redwood City Tribune*, August 22, 1970, 2.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/842925932/?match=1&terms=%22Sam%20McDonald%20Park%22>

62. *Redwood City Tribune*, “Camping Area Set For McDonald Park,” April 3, 1970, 16.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/842638818/?match=1&terms=%22Sam%20McDonald%20Park%22>

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them were adults. Finally, I told him he couldn't have it both ways. It couldn't be a youth group and still drink beer."⁶³

1976 Expansion of Sam McDonald County Park

In 1976 San Mateo County expanded Sam McDonald County Park from 430 acres to 867 acres by acquiring a neighboring property, part of the Towne Ranch, in order to connect Sam McDonald County Park to Pescadero Creek Park to the south.⁶⁴ The post-1970 park additions are outside the boundaries of Sam McDonald's 430-acre property and thus also outside the boundaries of the Sam McDonald Historic District.

Criterion A Conclusion

The Sam McDonald Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation, for San Mateo County's innovative development of Sam McDonald County Park as a "new concept in county parks" in 1970.⁶⁵ Sam McDonald County Park was dedicated in August, 1970 in memory of Sam McDonald, with a program of backpacking and youth group overnight camping in rustic campsites accessible only by walk-in trails. This innovation in county park development was San Mateo County's creative adaptation to Sam McDonald's beautiful redwood forest property that was, "too steep to be a traditional park."⁶⁶

By the summer of 1971, one year after the opening of Sam McDonald County Park, the park's program of youth group backpacking and overnight camping was evidently a success. For example, in July, 1971 the City of San Mateo Department of Recreation was operating a Wilderness Camp at Sam McDonald County Park for Peninsula boys and girls ages ten to twelve. It was staffed by camp counselors, a full time cook, and recreation leaders from the city's various playgrounds, with assistance from San Mateo County park rangers.⁶⁷

An announcement about the Wilderness Camp in the *San Mateo Times* offers a glimpse of the new youth group "camping adventure" at Sam McDonald County Park in 1971, featuring wilderness training, nature study, backpacking, and campfire social activities:

63. Walt Wright, "Final Wish Of A Black Man: New Park For the Young," *Redwood City Tribune*, August 22, 1970, 2.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/842925932/?match=1&terms=%22Sam%20McDonald%20Park%22>

64. County of San Mateo Department of Parks and Recreation, *Sam McDonald County Park Concept Plan*, September 1974, 1. Tom Baker, Interview with Marjorie Dobkin, October 30, 2024.

65. "La Honda Park To Open," *San Mateo Times*, May 14, 1970, 24. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1970/05-14/page-24>

66. Bob Emert, quoted in Michael Svanevik and Shirley Burgett, *San Mateo County Parks: A Remarkable Story Of Extraordinary Places and the People Who Built Them*, San Mateo County Parks Foundation, January 1, 2001, 78-79.

67. "Community Services Offer Two Wilderness Programs," *San Mateo Times* July 10, 1971, 31. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1971/07-10/page-31>

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WILDERNESS CAMP. Peninsula kids age 10-12 are offered an extraordinary camping adventure this summer. \$13.50 is the only charge for a week of “Wilderness Camp” at Sam McDonald Park high up in the Santa Cruz Mountains near La Honda. Five days and four nights are packed with hiking, wilderness crafts, wilderness cookery, map and compass reading, nature study and ecology awareness. Recreators, park rangers and naturalists and camp counselors provide the direction and leadership. Highlighting each Wilderness Camp is an overnight backpack excursion and Thursday night campfire social activity with visiting parents.⁶⁸

Significant Dates

1919	Emanuel B. “Sam” McDonald acquired first parcel of La Honda property
c. 1948	McDonald completed acquisition of 430 acres and established La Honda-Alpine-Ytaioa Reserve
August 1957	McDonald prepared Camp McDonald Preliminary Sketch Plan
November 1957	Sam McDonald death and bequest of La Honda property to Stanford University
1958	San Mateo County Acquisition of Sam McDonald Property from Stanford University
1970	Dedication of Sam McDonald County Park

68. “San Mateo Recreation Activities: Special Announcement,” *San Mateo Times* July 5, 1971, 20. <https://access-newspaperarchive-com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/us/california/san-mateo/san-mateo-times/1971/07-05/page-20>

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 430 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: n/a
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.313062N | Longitude: -122.286391W |
| 2. Latitude: 37.306389N | Longitude: -122.269727W |
| 3. Latitude: 37.296148N | Longitude: -122.259341W |
| 4. Latitude: 37.290873N | Longitude: -122.259384W |
| 5. Latitude: 37.301866N | Longitude: -122.276014W |
| 6. Latitude: 37.305485N | Longitude: -122.286185W |
| 7. Cabin: Latitude: 37.305485N | Longitude: -122.286185W |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the Latitude/Longitude points 1-7 (See above and Figure 1). The property is located in T7S R4W, parts of sections 22, 23, and 26. (USGS La Honda, CA 1997)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries define the full extent of Sam McDonald's 430-acre La Honda property, which San Mateo County acquired in 1958 and dedicated as Sam McDonald County Park in August, 1970.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Marjorie Dobkin, Ph.D., Historical Geographer
Laura Jones, Ph.D., Director, Stanford University Heritage Services
organization: Basin Research Associates, Inc.
County of San Mateo Parks Department
street & number: Sam Herzberg, Senior Planner, AICP
455 County Center, 4th Floor
city or town: Redwood City
state: California
zip code: 94063
e-mail: sherzberg@smcgov.org
telephone: 650-363-1823
date: July 24, 2025

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

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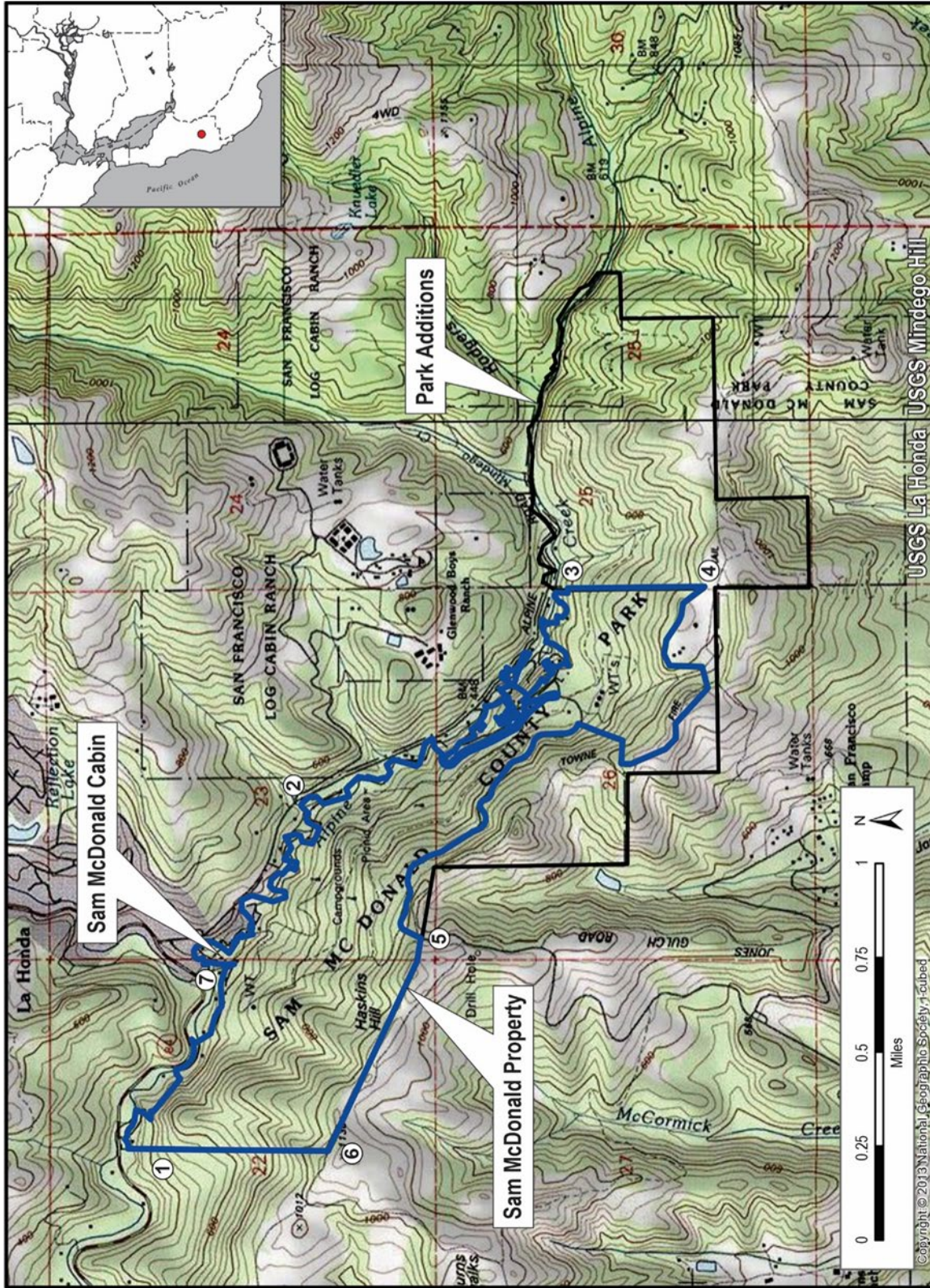


Figure 1: Sam McDonald County Park (USGS La Honda, CA 1997; Mindego Hill, CA 1997)

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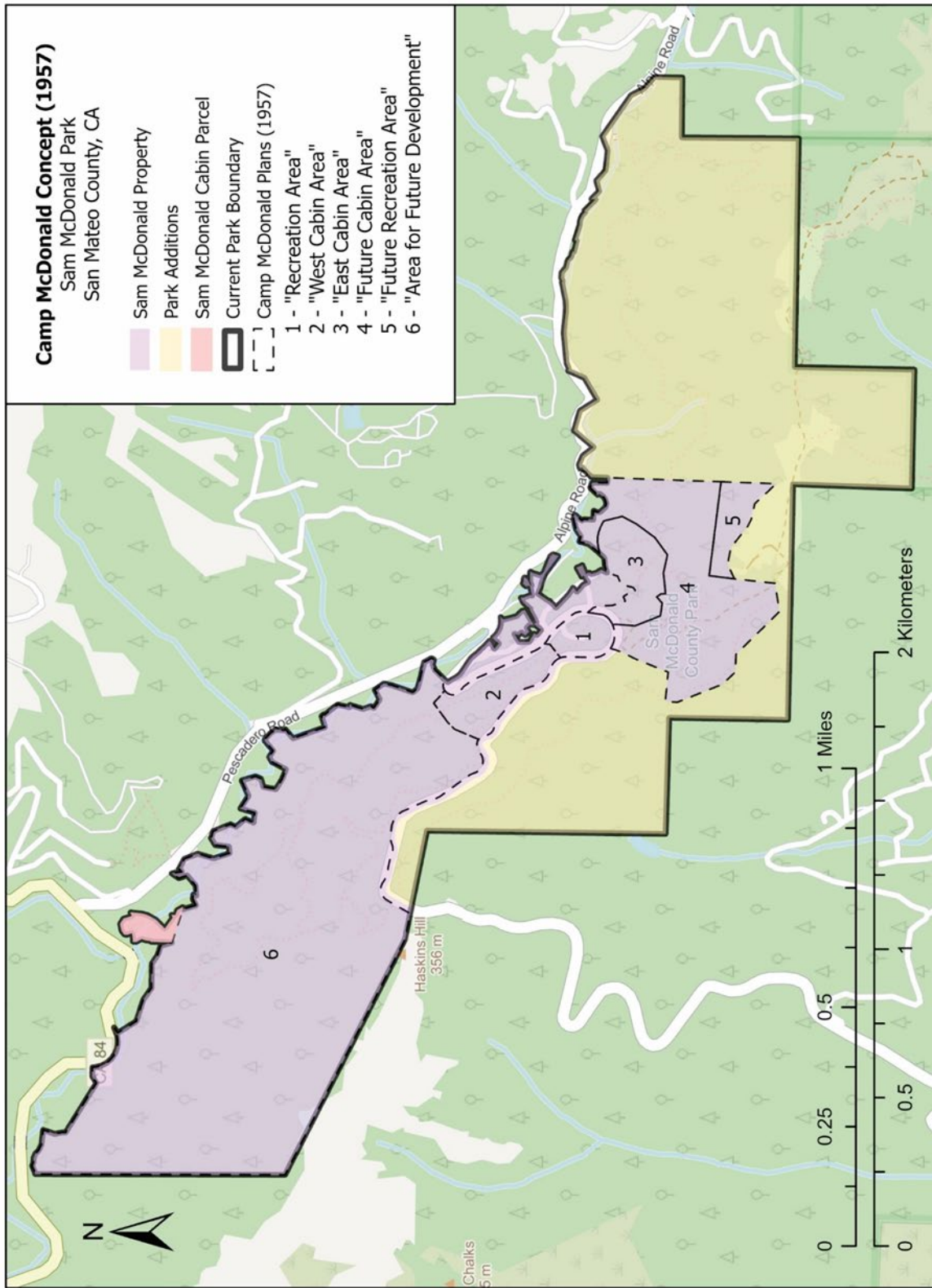


Figure 2: Camp McDonald Concept

Sam McDonald Park
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Figure 3: Sam McDonald Cabin Site - Sketch Map/Photo Key

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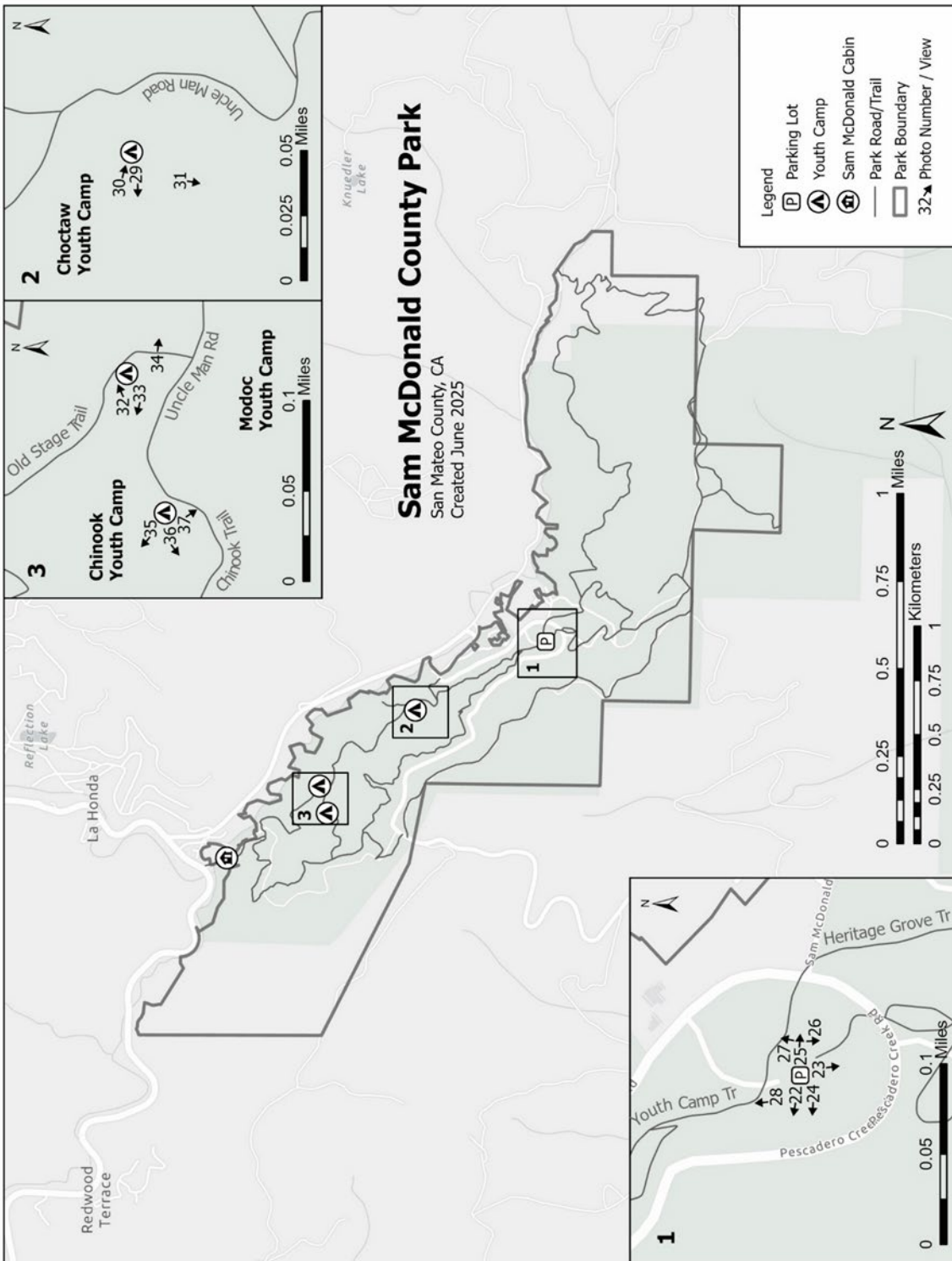


Figure 4: Sam McDonald County Park - Sketch Map/Photo Key

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Figure 5: Camp McDonald Preliminary Sketch (Lawrence G. Brian, Civil Engineer, August 19, 1957)

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Sam McDonald County Park
City or Vicinity: La Honda, California
County: San Mateo
State: California
Photographer: Laura Jones
Date Photographed: Cabin: November 12, 2024
Park Features: May 29, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Sam McDonald's Cabin

1 of 37 (1 of 37 West Elevation of Cabin.jpg)
Cabin Exterior – West Elevation

2 of 37 (2 of 37 West Elevation of Cabin with Redwood Stump.jpg)
Cabin Exterior – West Elevation with Redwood Stump

3 of 37 (2 of 37 North Elevation of Cabin.jpg)
Cabin Exterior – North Elevation

4 of 37 (3 of 37 East Elevation of Cabin from Northeast Corner.jpg)
Cabin Exterior – East Elevation from Northeast Corner

5 of 37 (5 of 37 South Elevation of Cabin.jpg)
Cabin Exterior – South Elevation

6 of 37 (6 of 37 Living Room Looking South.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Living Room Looking South

7 of 37 (7 of 37 Living Room Fireplace.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Living Room Fireplace

8 of 37 (8 of 37 Kitchen Looking East.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Kitchen Looking East

9 of 37 (9 of 37 Kitchen North Wall.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Kitchen North Wall

10 of 37 (10 of 37 Pantry Cupboards.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Pantry Cupboards

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11 of 37 (11 of 37 Pantry Cupboards.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Pantry Cupboards

12 of 37 (12 of 37 Bedroom Facing South.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Bedroom Facing South

13 of 37 (13 of 37 Bedroom Facing North.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Bedroom North Wall

14 of 37 (14 of 37 Enclosed Porch Facing North.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Enclosed Porch Facing North

15 of 37 (15 of 37 Enclosed Porch Facing South.jpg)
Cabin Interior – Enclosed Porch Facing South

16 of 37 (16 of 37 West Elevation of Garage.jpg)
Cabin Site – West Elevation of Garage

17 of 37 (17 of 37 Fence at Garage.jpg)
Cabin Site – Fence at Garage

18 of 37 (18 of 37 Honeymoon Cottage Foundation.jpg)
Cabin Site – Honeymoon Cottage Foundation

19 of 37 (19 of 37 Pump House)
Cabin Site – Pump House

20 of 37 (20 of 37 Road to Cabin Looking North.jpg)
Cabin Site – Road to Cabin Looking North from Cabin

21 of 37 (21 of 37 Alpine Creek Adjacent to Cabin Looking South.jpg)
Cabin Site – Alpine Creek Adjacent to Cabin Looking South

Sam McDonald County Park Features

22 of 37 (22 of 37 Park Headquarters Building.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Park Headquarters Building

23 of 37 (23 of 37 Flagpole.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Flagpole

24 of 37 (24 of 37 Storage Shed at Park Headquarters)
Sam McDonald County Park – Storage Shed at Park Headquarters

25 of 37 (25 of 37 Picnic Area at Park Headquarters.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

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26 of 37 (26 of 37 Picnic Area at Park Headquarters.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

27 of 37 (27 of 37 Picnic Area at Park Headquarters.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

28 of 37 (28 of 37 Trailhead at Park Headquarters.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Trailhead at Park Headquarters

29 of 37 (29 of 37 Fire Pit and Seating at Choctaw Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Fire Pit and Seating

30 of 37 (30 of 37 Restroom Building at Choctaw Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Restroom Building

31 of 37 (31 of 37 Barbecue and Picnic Area at Choctaw Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Barbecue and Picnic Area

32 of 37 (32 of 37 Restroom Building at Modoc Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Restroom Building

33 of 37 (33 of 37 Fire Pit and Seating at Modoc Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Fire Pit and Seating

34 of 37 (34 of 37 Picnic Area at Modoc Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Picnic Area

35 of 37 (35 of 37 Restroom Building at Chinook Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Restroom Building

36 of 37 (36 of 37 Fire Pit at Chinook Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Fire Pit

37 of 37 (37 of 37 Picnic Area at Chinook Youth Camp.jpg)
Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Picnic Area

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Photo 1: Cabin Exterior – West Elevation

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Photo 2: Cabin Exterior – West Elevation of Cabin with Redwood Stump

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Photo 3: Cabin Exterior – North Elevation

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 4: Cabin Exterior – East Elevation from Northeast Corner

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 5: Cabin Exterior – South Elevation

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 6: Cabin Interior – Living Room Looking South

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 7: Cabin Interior – Living Room Fireplace

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 8: Cabin Interior – Kitchen Looking East

Sam McDonald Park
Name of Property

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Photo 9: Cabin Interior – Kitchen North Wall

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 10: Cabin Interior – Pantry Cupboards

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 11: Cabin Interior – Pantry Cupboards

Sam McDonald Park
Name of Property

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Photo 12: Cabin Interior – Bedroom Facing South

Sam McDonald Park
Name of Property

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Photo 13: Cabin Interior – Bedroom North Wall

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 14: Cabin Interior – Enclosed Porch Facing North

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Photo 15: Cabin Interior – Enclosed Porch Facing South

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Photo 16: Cabin Site – West Elevation of Garage

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Photo 17: Cabin Site – Fence at Garage

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Photo 18: Cabin Site – Honeymoon Cottage Foundation

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Photo 19: Cabin Site – Pump House

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Photo 20: Cabin Site – Road to Cabin Looking North from Cabin

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Photo 21: Cabin Site – Alpine Creek Adjacent to Cabin Looking South

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Photo 22: Sam McDonald County Park – Park Headquarters Building

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Photo 23: Sam McDonald County Park – Flagpole

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Photo 24: Sam McDonald County Park – Storage Shed at Park Headquarters

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Photo 25: Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

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Photo 26: Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

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Photo 27: Sam McDonald County Park – Picnic Area at Park Headquarters

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Photo 28: Sam McDonald County Park – Trailhead at Park Headquarters

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Photo 29: Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Fire Pit and Seating

Sam McDonald Park
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Photo 30: Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Restroom Building

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Photo 31: Sam McDonald County Park – Choctaw Youth Camp – Barbecue and Picnic Area

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Photo 32: Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Restroom Building

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Photo 33: Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Fire Pit and Seating

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Photo 34: Sam McDonald County Park – Modoc Youth Camp – Picnic Area

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Photo 35: Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Restroom Building

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Photo 36: Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Fire Pit

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Photo 37: Sam McDonald County Park – Chinook Youth Camp – Picnic Area

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.