Western Gateway

Western Gateway Park has an astonishing variety of outdoor recreation offerings packed into 88 acres of beautiful, oak-studded land in Penn Valley. There is something for everyone in this well-appointed, carefully tended regional park. It even has its own website at www.westerngatewaypark.com with a list of amenities, activities, a map, and directions to the park. If you're looking for a quiet loop walk, run or bike ride then be sure to check out the Fitness Trail in the woods west of the landscaped central area.

Place: Penn Valley, CA
Season: Year around
Land: Western Gateway Recreation & Park District
Trail signs: One trailhead sign by parking lot; no direction signs along trail
Length: About a mile round trip, including access path to the loop from main parking area
Altitude change: Slight
Difficulty: Easy
Trail surface: Dirt
Environment: Mixed oak woodland and pines, riparian forest, and landscaped areas
Rules: Dogs on leash; no horses on Fitness Trail; clean up after dogs; exit park by dusk.

Trailhead:
To reach the park from Grass Valley, take Highway 20 west 5.6 miles and turn left at the light onto Penn Valley Drive. Follow it 0.6 mile to the center of town. At the stop sign, turn right and go 0.9 mile (this is still Penn Valley Drive) to the park's main gate on your right. Enter the park, then immediately turn right and follow the one-way road to the large parking lot at the top of the central green. Park on the west side of this lot near the bocce ball courts. (Note: You may also walk or bicycle to Western Gateway Park by using the Penn Valley Bike Trail. See separate trail listing for this option.)

There is a "Fitness Trail" sign about half way along the park road between the bocce ball courts and the nearby Buttermaker's Cottage (N39.20286 W121.19117). An arrow on the sign points across the grass in the direction of the trail. Walk across the grass as indicated by the arrow, with the bocce courts on your right. After about 100 yards you will see a disc golf tee ahead with a cement pad and a narrow wooden bench. A short way downhill past this tee you will find the trail in a glade with oak trees. Go left on the trail.

Note: There are two other ways to get on the Fitness Trail from the main parking area. They are unmarked dirt paths that begin from the edge of the park road that runs north and downhill from the main parking area toward the creek. The first is on your left just as you are starting downhill toward the creek. Look for a group of trees with a small path through them that heads west along the grassy border north of the bocce ball courts. Farther downhill, almost to the children's play area in the glade by the creek, you will find a more obvious path. Look for a small white "Fire Lane" sign on your left and take the fairly wide path near this sign (N39.20344 W121.19054).

Fitness Trail Tips:
When you do this trail for the first time, it can be confusing because the park is laced with a network of other paths, many of them used by disc golfers. The main idea is to keep going forward and not to go off sharply to either side. Also, when first learning the trail it is best to proceed counter-clockwise around the loop.

In the glade behind disc golf tee #1, mentioned above, there is a little bridge with pole railings. From there go uphill a bit, angling to the right past a sign on a tree that says "No Horses on Fitness Trail" and then continuing west.

About 0.25 mile along the trail from the little bridge noted above, you will come to a paved parking area in front of the off-leash dog park. Look for and take the narrow dirt path that angles gradually (not sharply) left from the place where you first reach pavement in the parking area. About 80 yards further, the path crosses the one lane paved road that leads to the dog park. Go straight across the road and keep going. The trail will now start curving to the left and in about 100 yards the trail will turn sharply back toward the northeast. It will again cross the dog park access road, then it will continue east alongside or through the disc golf course.
About 230 yards east of the dog park access road you will see another little bridge with pole railings. Cross this bridge and go sharply left to stay on the trail. About 200 yards east of this little bridge the trail passes a disc golf "hole" (basket) on the left, curves right and drops fairly steeply downhill for a short stretch. Near the base of this incline there are several paths and two disc golf tees -- one on your right and one straight ahead. Go to the tee that is straight ahead, at the bottom of the incline. From it angle left about 45°, go a short way to the little bridge with pole railings you see ahead, and then follow a faint path north from this bridge through the grass about 70 yards to the first bridge where you started the loop.

**Creek Trail:**

Back near the children's play structure in the glade by the creek, you will see a horseshoe court. It is opposite the small "Fire Lane" sign where one of the alternative trailheads to the Fitness Trail is located (see above). Barely visible in the bushes beyond the horseshoe pit on your right as you face toward the creek, a narrow path leads along the south bank of Squirrel Creek (N39.20341 W121.19018). If you venture up this trail, you will have some nice views of the creek and you may find a couple of places where you can get down to the creek.

About 200 yards east of the horseshoe court this trail curves away from the creek and arrives at a junction with a wooden bridge over a small gully on your left (N39.20272 W121.18848). If you go right at this bridge for about 20 yards you will be at a rustic outdoor amphitheater about 125 yards east of the main parking area. If you go left at the bridge you will quickly come to a fork in the trail. Staying left at the fork will take you along the creek again briefly and in about 75 yards you will arrive at the forest edge just north of the handball courts. Staying right at the fork will take you about 30 yards to a meadow near the tennis courts. Both the handball and tennis courts are located in the most southeasterly corner of Western Gateway Park. This is a separate section of the park which is accessed through the East Gate of the park along Penn Valley Drive.

If you have arrived at the handball or tennis courts by the creek trail just described, there are only two ways back to the main parking lot. (1) Return by the creek trail, or (2) go south to the parking lot at the East Gate, then west along the bike path that parallels Penn Valley Drive, then back up the central green to the main parking lot.

If you would like a longer walk than the Fitness Trail alone, start at the parking lot by the East Gate, go up past the handball courts, take the creek trail back to the horseshoe court, then pick up the Fitness Trail by entering the path near the "Fire Lane" sign near the children's play area. After looping around the Fitness Trail, retrace your route along the creek trail to the handball courts and then back to the parking lot by the East Gate. Total roundtrip distance of this option is about 2.5 miles.

**Parcourse:**

Not to be confused with the Fitness Trail described above, there is separate Parcourse (sometimes called "exercise trail") in Western Gateway Park. It is a series of ten stations running counterclockwise around the periphery of the grassy central green. Each station is well signed (except #7 which was missing as of November 2011). Each sign gives a brief description of the exercise to do at that station. Two of the stations have apparatus (#6 with pull-up bars, and #10 with parallel bars).

Station #1 "Arm Swing" can be found by walking about 90' northwest across the grass from the back edge of the bocce ball courts. It is near an information kiosk (sheltered bulletin board) that is visible from the bocce ball courts. From there walk nearly south about 50 yards to station #2, and so forth. The distance between stations varies considerably. Just stay on the periphery of the central landscaped area and keep walking counter-clockwise to find them. Station #10 is about 20 yards south of the restrooms on the east side of the main parking area at the top of the central green.