

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY JOINT VENTURE
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VISITING DON EDWARDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEWARK

We are excited to offer guided audio tours of some of the most beautiful locations accessible for travelers, commuters and anyone driving near or around SF Bay. This is our way of letting you know about our partners and their efforts to protect and restore thousands of acres of wetlands in the nine counties surrounding the Bay.

For now our tours take you to four 'learn and listen' locations in the South Bay where you'll find the largest urban wildlife refuge in the US. We also have a tour that is timed for listening while you drive in either direction along Highway 37 in the North Bay which traverses 40,000 acres of both privately and publicly owned protected lands.

Directions to the Refuge can be found on our website at www.yourwetlands.org.

LOCATION ONE

Jerry Kay: You're listening to a San Francisco Bay Joint Venture audio tour of the South Bay. On this tour, we visit the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newark and invite you to listen in while we deepen our understanding of and appreciation for the area. Its history; its habitat values, and its unique establishment as an urban refuge. This 12-minute tour includes three listen-and-learn locations. We also offer some extras that aren't location-specific, but provide information about hiking opportunities or offer more in-depth dialogue with some of the people you'll meet along the way.

This first listen-and-learn location is adjacent to the refuge visitor's center and right next to the parking lot. You'll notice a marsh to the east.

Here we meet Chief of Visitor's Services, Karla Tanner and manager of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Mendel Stewart.

Mendel Stewart: The Don Edwards Refuge was established in 1972; prior to that, it was part of the salt making process of Cargill. Salt making had been abandoned in the 60s; it was still pretty much salt beds out there. When we restore tidal action to the area, over time, the salt marsh re-established itself.

Karla Tanner: This was the first urban national wildlife refuge in the entire country. Just incredible. It's kind of an oasis of nature surrounded by the number of people that we have living here today.

Jerry Kay: Mendel, I understand that the refuge includes over 30,000 acres, but right here we're obviously looking at just a small part of it. What makes this spot special?

Mendel Stewart: We're looking at the La Riviere Marsh, and it has pickle weed, which is great habitat for a variety of migratory and resident species, both Clapper Rails and a variety of wading birds, such as Great Egrets and Herons that use this area extensively for feeding and resting. We're standing on a hill -- a natural hill, one of the few natural hills around San Francisco Bay. And the salt marsh, historically and the tides moved around this hill, over time, as development occurred, the tides were cut off. Roads were built, changes were made for the commercial salt operations, but those tidal connections were reestablished and the tides were brought back into this area. It's created some great habitat.

It's one of the best sites around San Francisco Bay for finding Clapper Rails. Clapper Rails are very secretive birds; live in the marsh, it's often difficult to find them, but you can hear them, you can often hear them clapping that noise that gives them their name.

Jerry Kay: How do I know that I'm looking at a salt marsh habitat? For instance, there's a plant I see everywhere lying low to the ground. It's sort of greenish and red. You mentioned pickle weed. How can you tell what that actually is?

Mendel Stewart: It has little flowers -- little leaves that look like little pickles, and I guess that's where they get the name pickle weed. Those leaves actually draw salt out of the marsh, and then as they get too salty, those little leaves will fall off and that's how it's able to adapt to the salty environment of the salt marsh.

This marsh is named after the Rivieres -- Phil and Florence La Riviere. They were citizen activists and they're still very active in the Bay area. They, along with other citizens in the late 60s started fighting for protection of wetlands. And through their actions, actually got this national wildlife refuge established, in law and saved thousands of acres of wetland that otherwise would've potentially been, and probably would have been converted to commercial and residential development. And through their actions, they inspired many others to join the fight and to help preserve wetlands all around the Bay.

And I think that it's time for a new generation to take up those kinds of causes and to step up and to help protect the other wetlands out there that still need to be protected.

Jerry Kay: And in order to have the desire and motivation to protect open spaces, a person first needs to have a connection with the place. If you're visiting the refuge for the first time, I hope you'll agree that we're off to a good start. Please continue to join us on our walking tour by heading up the hill to a bench lookout at our second listen-and-learn location.

LOCATION TWO

Jerry Kay: This second listen-and-learn location is an overlook which requires a short walk up a hill at the west end of the parking lot. There you'll find a bench which provides us with an excellent observing location to see the expansive views of the refuge. Here, Mendel and Karla are joined by Florence La Revere.

Mendel Stewart: The Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge is about 30,000 acres. It extends from just south of the San Mateo Bridge, all the way around the south end of the Bay, back up to Menlo and into Redwood City. It's a very large area.

The actual bay is basically a mile from here. The Bay is separated from the salt ponds. And so, to actually get to the Bay, you have to drive out to the actual bridge part that you can see from here at the Dumbarton Bridge, where it actually goes up above and arches over the Bay. So, it's a mile out to get to the Bay.

This part that we're looking at is still managed by Cargill for salt production. We're looking at a series of ponds that condense the bay water, make it saltier and saltier and eventually is harvested as a commercial salt operation by Cargill. And they have the right to continue to do that in perpetuity.

But the underlying ownership - it's still a national wildlife refuge - that is going to be this way for a long time, probably because Cargill has the right to continue to make salt here. However, on the other side of the bay, we have the opportunity, and we're taking that opportunity, to restore many of these former salt ponds back to salt marsh. This refuge was established to create habitats and to continue that into the future, and through the acquisition that we just recently made in 2003 of buying a bunch of these salt ponds from Cargill, we're able to do that restoration.

Part of that big process of restoration is also bringing the public back through. Trails that will be developed and interpretative exhibits, and connecting the people back to the Bay.

Jerry Kay: Tell us a little more about the slough.

Karla Tanner: The Newark slough is the long thin body of water right in front of us. It's three miles long and connects La Riviere Marsh to the bay. A lot of times you'll find kayakers out there and hopefully they've checked the tide tables, because it's a long wade if you get stuck in the mud when the tide goes out.

Sometimes you'll see seals down there in the slough as well. It's just an incredible view from here, taking a look at the marshland all along there. And one of my favorite times to be here is toward evening in the wintertime when there can be incredible sunsets as you look at the setting sun off toward San Francisco.

Jerry Kay: Karla, as we turn north looking towards San Francisco, I see two red buildings down there. What are those?

Karla Tanner: The smaller of the two buildings - the lower one that's facing the salt pond - is an old hunter's cabin from when waterfowl hunters used to come and inhabit it on weekends or during hunt season, and go out and hunt for ducks.

The other one is currently used as a picnic shelter for environmental education activities.

Jerry Kay: Florence La Riviere, you've visited this very spot many, many times. Can you tell me what it looked like over the years?

F. La Riviere: It looked a good deal what it looks like now. But, the salt company that owned these ponds for the commercial production of salt - solar evaporation - had planned a city of 60,000 people right there under this cliff.

Jerry Kay: Sixty?

F. La Riviere: Sixty-thousand. And another in the pond across the bay, another city; the salt company had great plans for development in these ponds.

Jerry Kay: So Florence, when we look at this marsh right now, we actually need to imagine 60,000 people living right there?

F. La Riviere: That's right. Without the establishment of the refuge, there would be huge development here.

Jerry Kay: Thanks to the work of dedicated people like Florence, there are still places to go to in the Bay Area where you can see remarkably diverse wetland habitats. This kind of refuge is rare in any urban setting, and indeed part of what makes the Bay Area special. We invite you to continue up the hill a short distance to hear more about saving the bay with Florence.

LOCATION THREE

Jerry Kay: Heading just a few hundred yards further in the same direction you came, as the view opens up to your left which is the east, look for a marsh below and the town of Newark in the distance. Here we have a chance to speak more intimately with one of the pioneering champions of the refuge and the Bay, Florence La Riviere.

Florence, does that marsh below us right there have a name?

F. La Riviere: (Laughs). This is a set-up.

Jerry Kay: That's a set-up, go ahead, what's the name of it?

F. La Riviere: That is a marsh that we have been honored to have placed in our name. That is the La Riviere Marsh. We're so happy to be recognized in that way, because that was a flat bunch of crystallizer ponds after the salt company had abandoned it, it was useless for wildlife for the most part. And when the refuge manager decided we can make a tidal marsh with lush vegetation out of that if we add water. And they let water in under the road going along, and Newark slough is right here.

They let water in under there and look at it now. It's beautiful, it has endangered species, it's a place where people can walk and enjoy the marsh and maybe even see a Rail. And even the flat areas that you see in the distance on

this plot, serve a function for the kinds of wildlife that like those flat, white areas. There's a little bit of that left in the upper reaches.

But the wonderful thing about this view, to me, is that if you look at all the building, it comes marching right up and stops, huge development right against the refuge boundary. And I know that if we hadn't fought so many years ago to establish this refuge, every place we're looking and indeed where we're standing would be built on.

Jerry Kay: We're looking east, but if we look north, there's quite a bit of land out there that I gather has also been preserved?

F. La Riviere: Some of that has, some of it's under question right now. Some of that is in the East Bay Regional Park District in the Coyote Hills. So, that has been preserved, but we're not through there. There's about 90 acres just on the other side of the bridge road that needs to be given back to the Bay. And a few hundred acres just beyond it.

Those lands are particularly vital right now, because sea level is predicted to rise, and if we don't save those lands, the animals are really going to be lost.

Jerry Kay: Florence, what message do you want to communicate to folks?

F. La Riviere: I'd like to communicate two ideas to people; one, wherever you live, wherever you are, you have the obligation of preserving the wildlife and the wild places, the wildlife that we share this earth with. No matter where you are or what stage of life you're in, you can contribute. You can go to officials and say we want these lands kept, we want our children to see what animals lived here.

The other thing is, you need to recognize what you have. You need to fight by whatever means you have to preserve those. And then you need to be persistent, because it can get very discouraging. If you give up, you lose all chance of acquiring what you can achieve if you stick with it. And it's often years and years.

Looking to the future, we have not finished what we started here. There are still thousands of acres on the Bay. And as long as there are people who care and who inform the public by what other means that we have a need for what is possible to be restored, to be acquired for us, the people.

Jerry Kay:

This concludes our audio tour of the Don Edwards National Wildlife refuge. If you're inspired by what you've seen and you want to learn more about the efforts to protect wetlands in the Bay area, please visit the website of the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture. Which is sfbayjv.org. We also produce a podcast called Your Wetlands, and you can subscribe by going to yourwetlands.org.

The Refuge Visitor's Center is open every day from 10:00 to 5:00, except Mondays. Entrance gates open at 7:00 in the morning and close in the evening at 8:00 in the summer, and 6:00 in the winter.

We'd like to thank our guides Mendel Stewart, Karla Tanner, and Florence La Riviere. We also want to thank Cargill for their financial support of this project.

I'm Jerry Kay.

EXTRAS

KARLA'S FAVORITE TRAIL

Jerry Kay:

What's a favorite spot that you like to visit here?

Karla Tanner:

I like to walk on the Harrier Spur Trail, which is starting from the visitor center down toward La Riviere Marsh. And it follows the slough around to the south and gives you a good look at the slough and it keeps me in touch with what's happening with the tides, and how things change. And depending on what action is going on at the time. And it winds around and goes over the top of the hill and gives you a great view of the salt ponds on the Bay beyond.

So, in a mile and a half, which I often do at lunchtime, it's a very refreshing walk for me.

KARLA - MULT-IUSE TRAIL

Karla Tanner: We do have a lot of trails that are multiple-use and can be used for walkers or bicycle riders. A limited number of trails where you can also take dogs on the trail, but because of the wildlife and the fact that wildlife is our most important resource here; we do allow dogs on those trails where it's not going to be a problem for the wildlife.

KARLA - THINGS TO ENJOY

Karla Tanner: Most of the time when people come here it is to see the wetlands, but there's a lot more diversity to see as well. There's many different types of habitat, and in fact, you can go all the way from the Bay, the mud lands, tidal marsh, up to upland habitat as well, and go up to the top of the hill where there's an incredible view of the south-end of the Bay. And in fact, on a clear day you can see all the way to San Francisco.

There's a lot to see; it's never boring. Come in the morning, come in the evening, in between, and things change throughout the day. The seasons change, different wildlife is here, different birds to enjoy. And sometimes it's just fun to sit and watch and see how other people are enjoying the area too. And watch of the kids who are out here enjoying the environmental education programs and learning about the area, and just seeing what's here. Seeing what's important; see what's important to you.