Camping at Willson Peak

Wilderness-style camping, without designated sites and conveniences such as outhouse or picnic table.

Camp at large flat grassy area on top of Willson Peak. Trees provide some shade. Afternoon winds are common. In winter, it can be foggy and cold.

From this high point you can see most of the park ridges and canyons - Wasno Ridge, Willow Ridge, Burra Burra, Robison Mountain, distant ridges of Orestimba Wilderness.

Water sources

Seasonal Spike Jones Spring is 0.4 miles from Steer Ridge Road and 1.6 miles from the Willson Peak.

Mistletoe and Willson Camp springs near Willson Camp are reliable during all but driest years. Willson Camp is 1.7 miles from Willson Peak.

Another option is the small seasonal pond below the peak, on the north side of Steer Ridge Road. No trail leads to the pond.

Later in the season, pack water in.

When creek has high water

If Hunting Hollow Creek is impassable after heavy rain, you can scramble along the hillside from the concrete bridge on Gilroy Hot Springs road to Steer Ridge and Jim Donnelly trails.

Trip highlights

- Camping at the the peak, near large blue oaks
- Best poppies in the park (early April)
- Gorgeous panoramic views
- Great for watching sunrise, sunset and stargazing
- Rich variety of spring wildflowers

- **The Park is open year round, 7 days a week/24 hours. Hunting Hollow entrance is not staffed, self-registration only.**
- **In summer, temperatures above 90 degrees between 11AM and 7:30-8PM are not unusual. Hike early in the morning and late in the evening. Plan shorter trips when necessary to prevent heat exhaustion.**
- **In winter, expect cold nights - mid-30s or below. In winter and spring, many creeks may be impassable after heavy rain.**
- **There is no potable water at the Hunting Hollow trailhead.**

Pine Ridge Association

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Henry W. Coe State Park

Backpacking Trips - Hunting Hollow

Willson Peak

Poppies near Willson Peak - April 7, 2009

Duration: 2 days

Difficulty: moderate

Distance, elevation gain/loss:
one way, via Jim Donnelly Trail with side trip to Spike Jones Spring: 5.6 miles, +2000/-250 feet
one way, via Lyman Willson Ridge Trail: 5.7 miles, +1960/-200 feet

Trailhead: Hunting Hollow on Gilroy Hot Springs Road

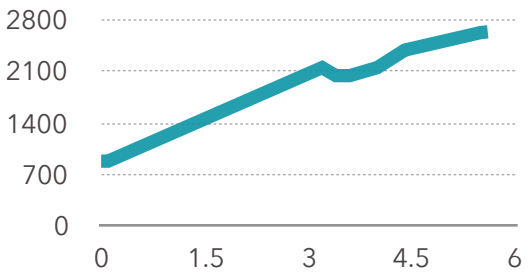
Permits/fees: Backpacking permit and parking fees required; self-register for Grizzly Gulch Zone (Willson Peak)

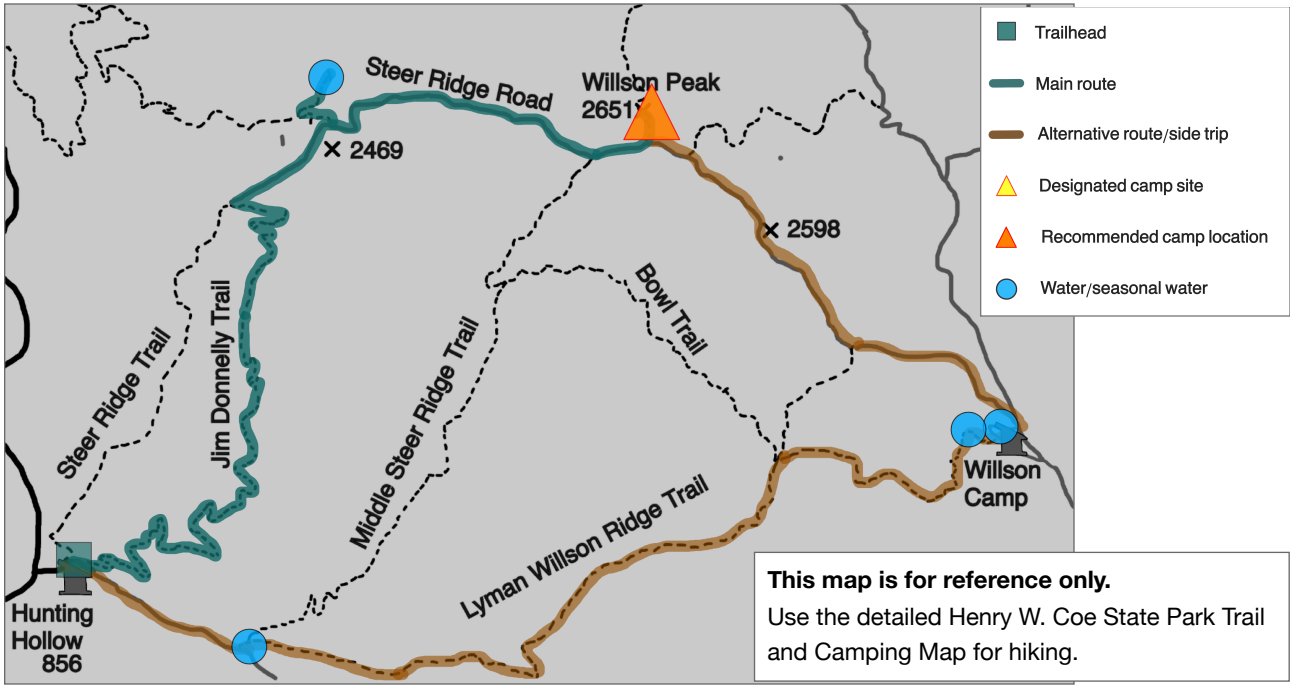
Key points - one way, via Jim Donnelly

0.0		Start on Hunting Hollow Road, cross the creek
0.1	W*	Turn left onto Jim Donnelly Trail
3.2		Junction with Steer Ridge Trail, turn right
3.6		If need water - turn left onto Spike Jones Trail
4.0	W*	Spike Jones Spring
4.4		Back on Steer Ridge Road, continue east
5.5		Turn left onto Willson Peak Trail
5.6		Willson Peak, **CAMP**

Distance and elevation approximate.
W/W* - water/seasonal water source. Check water source conditions with park staff or at www.coepark.net.

Elevation - one way, via Jim Donnelly





This map is for reference only.
Use the detailed Henry W. Coe State Park Trail and Camping Map for hiking.

Route

From the parking lot, cross/ford the creek, and in a few hundred feet turn left onto Jim Donnelly Trail.

Climb steadily at moderate grade through meadows and groves of bay and oak trees, adorned with lacy lichen. Coast live oaks provide deep shade, welcomed on a hot day.

After 1.3 miles, you'll find a picnic table in a sunny open meadow.

At 3.2 miles, at the junction with Steer Ridge Road, stands an old bay tree with large rocks under its crown - a pleasant spot for a break.

Continue up Steer Ridge Road along the open grassy ridge, dotted with oaks.

At 3.6 miles, look for Spike Jones trail on the left. If you need water, take a side trip to the spring.

At 5.5 miles, at the sign 'Willson Peak 0.1 mile' on the left side of the road, turn left towards flat grassy top with few large oaks.

In spring time, before heading to the peak, explore a large rocky area few hundred feet down the Steer Ridge Road.

Here, on serpentine soil, poppies are spectacular, together with cream cups and and birds-eye gilias. In late summer, pungent sticky tarweed takes over the ridge crest.

Alternative route

Late in season, to find water on the way out, take Hunting Hollow Road (level, along the creek, with multiple crossings), Lyman Willson Ridge Trail (steep climb) and Bowl Trail (fairly level).

As you approach Willson camp, look for springs on the left side of Bowl Trail. Mistletoe and Willson Camp springs are reliable during all but driest years.

From the the Willson camp, Willson Peak is 1.7 miles north-west on Steer Ridge Road.