



Laguna de Santa Rosa “Headwaters” Loop Walk in Cotati

This fairly flat 3-mile urban walk includes part of the Cotati Creek Critters 1-mile restoration site, a low-water permaculture “pocket park,” and the surprising historic headwaters of the Laguna de Santa Rosa. For reference, preview the road and route map following the walk description.

Begin the walk in downtown Cotati

- Depending on how much time you have and the level of traffic noise, you may like to start by the statue of Jim Boggio, accordion player, in historic La Plaza Park, site of Cotati’s annual Accordion Festival.
- Or, start your walk by the statue of the mythical Chief Kotati in the section of La Plaza Park now devoted to a low water demonstration garden with native plants. There was once a Coast Miwok village called Kotati, but it was a few miles north of the present day City.
- Or, you may like to start by the flag pole and the statue of Athena, the result of a collaborative art project with Sonoma State University, close to the rose garden near the intersection of Old Redwood Hwy and W. Sierra Avenue. Here, a plaque reveals that Cotati’s hexagonal downtown plaza is Historical Landmark number 879. The “Hub” refers to the hexagonal layout of the center of Cotati, commissioned in the 1890’s by Cotati’s founder, Thomas Page. It is one of only two hexagonally-based cities in the USA. Thomas Page had ten children, and named the six streets of the outer Hub after six of his sons: Charles, Henry, Olof, William, George, and Arthur.

If any of this piques your interest in Cotati’s colorful and varied past, you may like to visit Cotati’s History Museum, pick up a leaflet of Cotati’s historical walking tour (available at Cotati Chamber of Commerce, 216 E. School St., Cotati, CA) or read more about it in the references below.

Meanwhile, the rest of this walk will focus on Cotati’s creeks and will follow the main channel of the Laguna de Santa Rosa to its current “headwaters.”

From downtown Cotati:

1. Go south on Old Redwood Hwy, to **Cotati Creek** (look for the “Ours to Protect: Cotati Creek” sign at the bridge over the concrete-lined channelized creek). Cotati Creek flows in from the hills to the west of Cotati and runs underneath Old Redwood Hwy at this point.
2. Immediately south of Cotati Creek, turn left alongside it, down a winding path, next to the **Frogsong Cohousing Community**. As you approach Ross Street, contrast the old “pave it and pipe it” approach to stormwater (“get the stormwater out of town as fast

as possible”) at Cotati Creek with the new “slow it, spread it, sink it” philosophy displayed at Frogson (allowing water to slow, spread, sink in and recharge the groundwater, cleaned and filtered by plants along the way).

3. Turn right into **Ross St.**, left into **McGinnis Circle**. On your left you will pass a protected wetlands area with artificially created vernal pools, part of a mitigation project when the surrounding buildings were developed. The symphony of frogs in spring is what gave the Frogson Community its name.
4. Ignoring the path to the left, which leads to Marsh Way, continue to the **pedestrian/bicycle bridge (“Elderberry Bridge”)** over the **Laguna de Santa Rosa channel** to get a view of Cotati Creek Critters’ restoration project. Most of the trees and shrubs alongside the channel were planted by Cotati Creek Critters, thanks to thousands of volunteers and a wide range of organizations and community groups. Over the bridge, turn to the right and you will see the 3rd interpretive sign of a series which tells the story of the restoration project. See www.CotatiCreekCritters.info for further information.
5. Continue along the path with the Laguna channel on your right, heading south over Benson Lane, and then east, past the back of Helen Putnam Park, to the **pedestrian/bicycle bridge at LaSalle Ave.** Here is the **low water demonstration Pocket Park**, previously a 5,000 square foot lawn, that now grows raspberries, blueberries, fruit trees, and native plants, thanks to a collaboration between Daily Acts (www.dailyacts.org) and the City of Cotati. Here also is Cotati Creek Critters’ 2nd interpretive sign, about the history of the area.
6. Continue along the path east to **Ladybug Park**. Cotati Creek Critters’ base of operations, Cotati City well lot # 2, is on the left, and the 1st interpretive sign with a map of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, is on the right, just before the park. The formal path ends at this point.
7. Continue into Ladybug Park (you are now in the City of Rohnert Park) and across the deep grassy swale, keeping to the right around a ponded area of willows (passing tennis courts above you on your left), and follow the path along the Laguna channel to the right, until you reach the **large storm drain near Liman Way**, which is the unexpectedly ugly “beginning” of the main Laguna channel and the beginning of CCC’s restoration site. Go over the big culvert at the end of the channel, to the right, and back on the other side of the Laguna channel and then turn left along a small concrete path between houses. Cross Myrtle Ave. and follow a mulched path between the houses, until you emerge at the bottom of a field.
8. Turn left here, with houses on your left and fields on your right, and on to the **Lydia Commons Mini-Park and Community Garden**. There is a picnic table and even a water tap here, a good place to stop, to take in the more peaceful rural view to the west over the fields. This is the Laguna headwaters area. The original course of the Laguna ran

this way, before it was ditched and culverted in the early 1950's. You can still see the remnants of the original course of the Laguna, across the corner of the field in front of you, especially during the rainy season.

From Lydia Commons onwards you have a few choices:

- A. **To the edge of the Laguna watershed:** Walk south on **Willow Ave.** to the intersection with Railroad Avenue. This is approximately the edge of the Laguna watershed. During heavy rainfall in winter, water flows north-west from here to the Laguna de Santa Rosa, and south towards the Petaluma River.
- B. **To the railroad:** An informal path just south of Lydia Commons goes left (east) behind the houses to the **railroad**, with possible future bicycle connectivity to Sonoma Mountain Village and beyond, and a possible future connection, one day, to the SMART trail running north-to-south next to the railroad tracks.
- C. **To stay off roads**, go back the way you came, or
- D. **For the 3-mile loop walk**, go:
 1. south on Willow
 2. turn right (west) on Eucalyptus,
 3. right on Lebec
 4. left on John Roberts
 5. right on Macklin
 6. left on Myrtle
 7. right on Park
 8. from here you can return to downtown Cotati by a choice of routes:
 - a. either follow the paths parallel to Old Redwood Hwy, over Cotati Creek and back into town;
 - b. or turn right into Benson Lane and left along the Laguna channel, and back the way you came, past the Frogsong Cohousing Community.

Congratulations! You have met the Laguna de Santa Rosa headwaters! Visit downtown Cotati for a snack, lunch or a cup of tea.

For information on Laguna public education events, more Laguna walks, and restoration work days visit the Cotati Creek Critters website: www.CotatiCreekCritters.info and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation website www.lagunafoundation.org

References and resources:

- Cotati Historical Society and museum: www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org
- Cotati Historical Walking Tour
- Cotati Creek Critters: www.CotatiCreekCritters.info – includes Resources, Press & Media articles, etc.
- Daily Acts: www.dailyacts.org
- Laguna Headwaters website: coming soon!

