

How Local Trails Helped Us Train for a 4,000 Foot Summit

By Kelly Gregg Rubingh, San Carlos resident of 23 years



Thanks to accessible, local trails, the Wanderlust Women Travel group, was ready to conquer a 4,000-foot mountain summit hike.

In June we embarked on a five-day trek through the Scottish Highlands. Our journey included 25 miles along the West Highland Way, followed by the climb up Ben Nevis, the highest peak in the UK.

Two months before our trip, the preparations began. Living in the Bay Area, we're fortunate to have abundant open space and challenging trails nearby. We needed hikes that were close to home, easily accessible, and gradually increased in difficulty. I created a weekly schedule:

- **Saturdays:** 5–7 mile hikes at a local preserve
- **Sundays:** progressively longer hikes at Purisima Creek
- **Wednesdays:** short but effective evening hikes at Big Canyon or Eaton Park

Saturday Training – Pulgas Ridge

We made **Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve** our Saturday base. Just up the hill in San Carlos, it spans 366 acres and offers shaded trails, modest elevation, and a great 5.5-mile loop. There's a parking lot, pit toilet, and even an off-leash area for dogs. The ridgetop sections offered solid training and scenic views without taking too much time.

Adding Variety – Edgewood Park

To increase difficulty, we rotated in **Edgewood Park**, located just off I-280. While less shaded, Edgewood offered more mileage and springtime wildflower displays that were vibrant. With combined trails, we worked up to eight miles. Wildlife sightings—rabbits, deer, and butterflies—added to the experience. Bathrooms and a well-kept parking area made it a great training spot as our stamina improved.

Sunday Training – Purisima Creek

Our main endurance day was Sunday, and nothing beat **Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve**. About 25 minutes away off Skyline Boulevard, we started from the **North Ridge trailhead**, which has limited parking and a pit toilet.

The **Harkins Ridge–Purisima Creek Trail** combination became our go-to. It's a rewarding mix of redwoods, ferns, hill climbs, occasional fog, and—on clear days—long ocean views. We began with a six-mile out-and-back, gradually working up to ten. The climb back up, often in the sun, was the most challenging part—perfect training for the push up Ben Nevis. There's also the option to hike all the way down to the Half Moon Bay trailhead if you set up a car shuttle (about eight miles one-way). Purisima offered our most rigorous preparation and became our favorite spot to build both strength and focus.

Midweek Quick Hike – Big Canyon and Eaton Park

Despite limited time midweek, we carved out 90 minutes for **Big Canyon Park** in San Carlos. The trail entrance is tucked between homes on Brittan Avenue and drops into a shaded ravine filled with bay trees, ferns, and small wooden bridges. In spring, wildflowers line the path. If you reach the top, you're rewarded with a broad view over San Carlos and the bay—especially lovely near sunset.

When we wanted to stretch the distance, we continued across the street to **Eaton Park**, which features a short but steep climb and a labyrinth at the summit—a fun midweek reward.

Despite a full schedule, local trails made it possible to prepare for one of the toughest hikes many of us have attempted. I'm happy to report that all the Wanderlust Women made it to the top of Ben Nevis—injury-free!

Kelly has lived in San Carlos for 23 years, where she is active in the community and in local theater. She is the founder of Wanderlust Women Travel, a small-group travel company offering curated, affordable adventures for women that combine cultural exploration, active experiences, and a supportive, fun atmosphere.



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