



2026

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



Donald and Bernice Watson Recreation Trail

California



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Nestled on the north side of the sprawling Los Angeles metropolis, the Donald and Bernice Watson Recreation Trail (formerly the Duarte Recreational Trail) runs on parallel asphalt and dirt paths for 1.6 miles through the town of Duarte. Connecting a park, a K-8 school, a medical center, and churches, the trail knits together the community at the foot of the looming San Gabriel Mountains and Angeles National Forest.

About the Route

The 5-acre Royal Oaks Park, with parking and restrooms, serves as a good starting point at the east end of the trail. Trail users will notice there's plenty of room in the corridor for both the paved and dirt paths, separated by a series of fence posts. Bicyclists prefer the paved trail,

while horseback riders tend to use the dirt trail. Walkers and joggers frequent both. The trail is open from dawn to dusk.

On sunny days, native oaks provide welcome shade. The Indigenous peoples who first settled here 2,500 years ago used acorns from oaks like these to create a flour paste that provided a major part of their diet.

An especially picturesque sight emerges 1.1 miles down the trail as it passes beneath the old arched Oak Avenue Bridge, which once carried traffic over the tracks between Royal Oaks Drive North and Royal Oaks Drive. The bridge is now closed to traffic.

Trail History

The trail follows a short segment of a former electrified trolley system that served the booming Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties in the first half of the 20th century. Known locally as the Red Cars, the privately owned Pacific Electric Railway got its start in 1901. It laid more than 1,000 miles of track throughout Southern California, growing with the promise of supplying electricity to far-flung communities.

The system declined after World War II with the increased use of automobiles and trucks and the construction of freeways. The system was sold in 1960. Some of the old corridors became rapid transit lines, while housing sprouted on others. This segment through Duarte opened as a trail in 1977 due to the efforts of former Duarte mayor Donald Watson, the first Black city councilman and mayor in the Los Angeles area, and his wife, Bernice.

The city is named for Andres Duarte, a Mexican soldier who was granted 7,000 acres here in 1841 while the area was still under Mexican rule. When the United States gained control of California after the Mexican-American War, Duarte launched a legal battle to retain title to his land grant. The US



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States: California

Counties: Los Angeles

Length: 1.6miles

Trail end points: Buena Vista St. (Duarte) to
Royal Oaks Park, 2627 Royal Oaks Dr. (Duarte)

Trail surfaces: Asphalt, Dirt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Bike, Horseback
Riding, Walking, Wheelchair Accessible

Parking & Trail Access

The Donald and Bernice Watson Recreation Trail runs between Buena Vista St. (Duarte) and Royal Oaks Park, 2627 Royal Oaks Dr. (Duarte), where parking is available.

Please see [TrailLink Map](#) for detailed directions.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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