



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides   



**Old Railroad
Grade (CA)**
California



Old Railroad Grade (CA)

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As it winds up to the eastern peak of Mount Tamalpais in Marin County, this picturesque trail offers an exhilarating combination of far-reaching views, history and challenge. The trail follows the route originally carved out for the Mt. Tamalpais Scenic Railway, which opened in 1896 and soon gained international fame as the "Crookedest Railroad in the World."

Boasting a total of 281 curves and 22 trestles, the route featured a unique feat of engineering called the double bowknot, a place where a track paralleled itself five times to gain elevation in a very small area on the mountain. Visitors flocked to the railroad, many to experience the "gravity cars," small four-wheel carts that whisked passengers down the mountain at 10 to 12 miles per hour.

Like the scenic railway that preceded it, the Old Railroad Grade is anything but typical. It is a steady climb to the 2,571-foot-high East Peak (the highest point on Mt. Tam), and you should expect a challenging—and rewarding—trip to the top.

The trail begins at the end of Fern Canyon Road, with ample street parking near the trailhead. If you are feeling particularly ambitious, you can begin in downtown Mill Valley, where the train once started, and ride up to this point. Soon you come to a fork; bear right and follow signs for the Old Railroad Grade from there.

At 2.5 miles, you arrive at the West Point Inn, the only surviving structure of the railway. A fine spot to take a break and re-energize, the inn offers world-class views that include parts of the East Bay and San Francisco, the Marin Headlands, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Pacific Ocean.

You continue to wind up the mountain until you arrive at the East Peak Visitor Center, the end of the trail. From here, you can see parts of nine counties on clear days, including the majestic Sierra Nevada. In addition to the visitor center, there is a snack bar, restrooms, parking lot (you can also drive to the East Peak) and access to a number of hiking trails, including a 0.3-mile plank walk to the lookout tower at the top of the peak.



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States: California

Counties: Marin

Length: 4.4 miles

Trail end points: Fern Canyon Rd, 0.6 mile west of Summit Ave to Mt. Tamalpais State Park Visitor Center (Mill Valley)

Trail surfaces: Dirt

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Horseback Riding, Mountain Biking, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

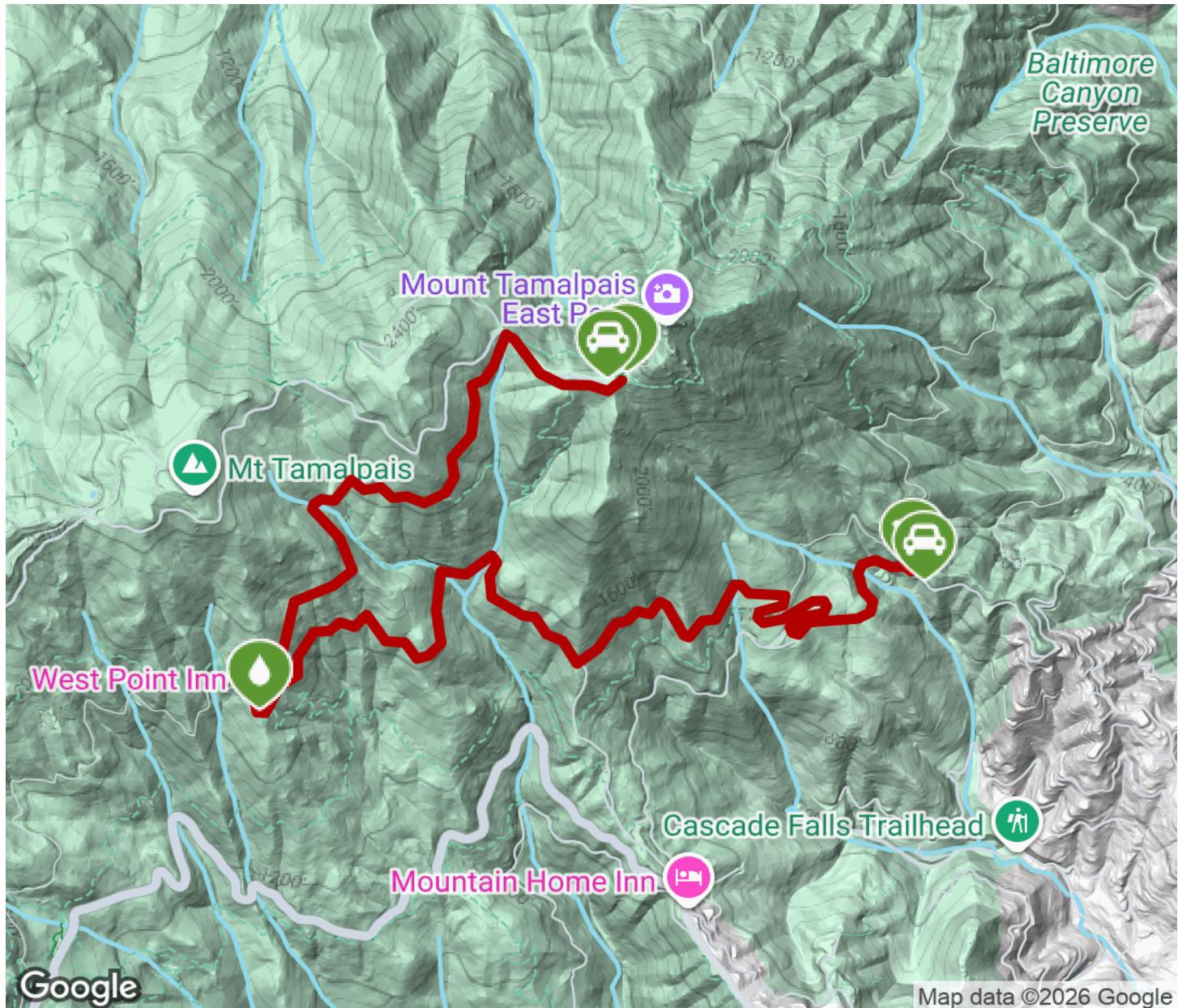
Parking is available at the East Peak Visitor Center (end of E. Ridgecrest Blvd, 6.8 miles east of Fairfax-Bolinas Rd) and there is on-street parking at end of Fern Canyon Road, 0.6 mile west of Summit Ave.

Visit the [TrailLink map](#) for detailed directions.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

[TrailLink.com](https://www.TrailLink.com)