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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.

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 Supreme Court eventually ruled in his favor in 1878, but by then he had sold his entire ranch piece by piece to pay off debts and legal fees.

The 5-acre Royal Oaks Park, with parking and restrooms, serves as a good starting point at the east end of the trail. You'll notice there's plenty of room on 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 mile 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.



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**States:** California

**Counties:** Los Angeles

Length: 1.6miles

**Trail end points:** Buena Vista St, between Orange Ave & Royal Oaks Dr (Duarte) to Royal Oaks Park (2627 Royal Oaks Dr, Duarte)

**Trail surfaces:** Asphalt,Dirt

**Trail category:** Rail-Trail

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

## Parking & Trail Access

Operating in Southern California's San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys, the Foothill Transit provides access to the trail. Vineyard Ave and Royal Oaks Dr is the closest bus stop.

The eastern trailhead starts by Royal Oaks Park (2627 Royal Oaks Dr, Duarte), which has parking, restrooms, sports fields. The western trailhead is on the right at the corner of Royal Oaks Drive and Buena Vista Street. On-street parking is available nearby.

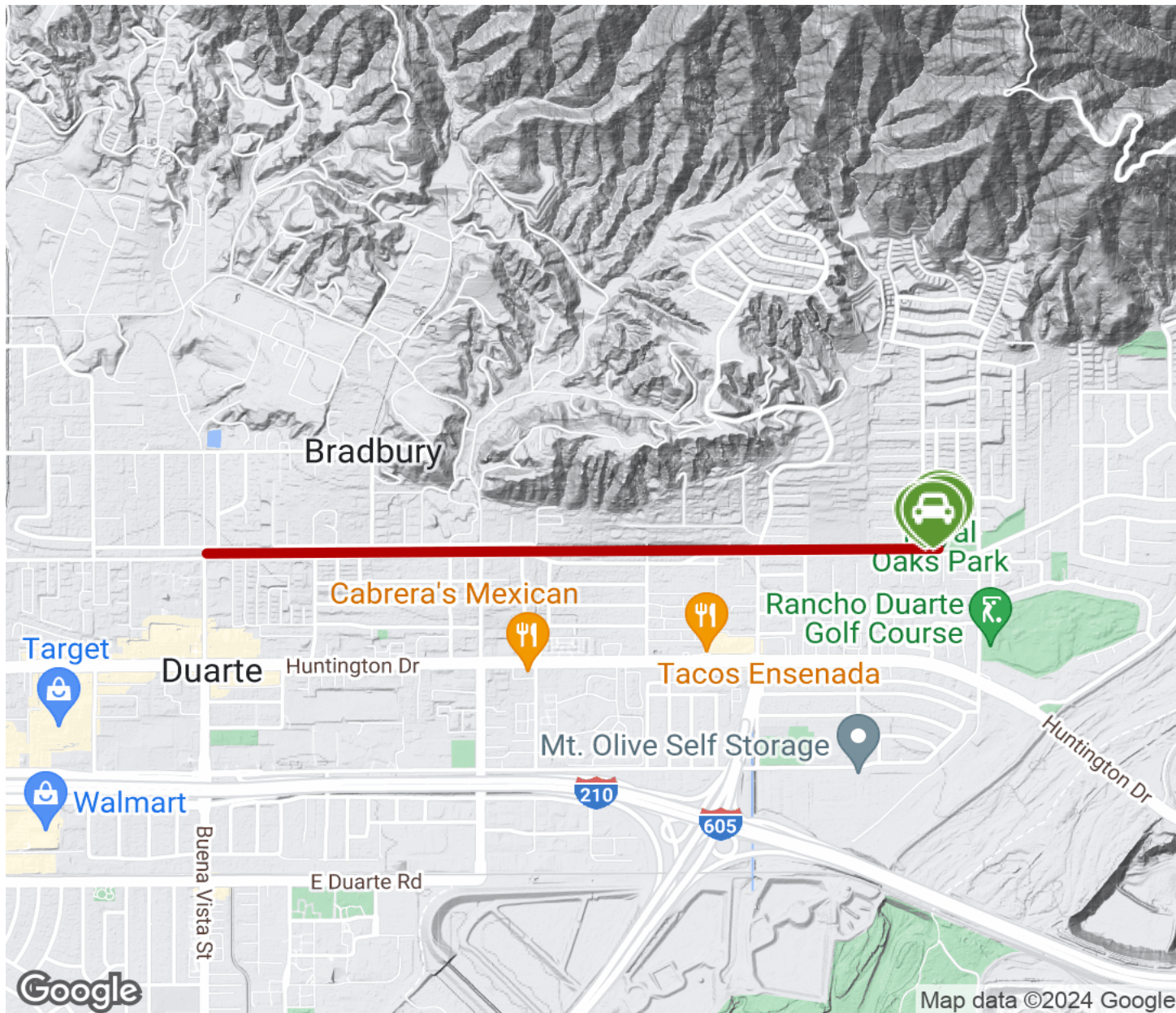
Visit the [TrailLink map](#) for transit options and detailed directions.





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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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