



**Forbidden Fields:** A guard stops cars at the entrance of Palo Alto's Foothill Park to check IDs.

# Private Parts

*Locals vocal about barring outsiders from Palo Alto park*

**BY HAL PLOTKIN**

Palo Alto's exclusive residents-only Foothill Park is the forbidden fruit of local nature preserves. The park's entrance, set amid the gentle rolling hills above Stanford, has the air of a border crossing. Uniformed

rangers requesting identity papers routinely turn back all non-Palo Altans.

Safely hidden from nature lovers in neighboring communities are a small lake, strands of picnic tables, a slate-flat meadow the size of

several football fields, a commanding vista of the entire bay and an assortment of trails stretching out in every direction, though mostly up.

The park's most delightful feature, to Palo Altans at least, is the

paucity of human visitors. On a recent sunny afternoon, for example, just three residents were visible strolling inside the spacious park. As I approached, two of them quickly veered off into a small valley, quietly signaling a desire for privacy. Foothill Park is the place Palo Altans come when they want to be alone. It's an exclusivity some think symbolizes the excesses of a city which—John Vasconcellos, forgive me—may have too much self-esteem.

Living next door to Stanford University, the city's denizens have grown accustomed to the accepted local practice of privatizing facilities paid for with public funds. So much so that when a newly elected member of the Palo Alto City Council recently suggested reviewing the residents-only admission policy, he was roundly roasted and threatened with immediate recall.

The controversy has a long history. Back in 1959, the founder of the Palo Alto Medical Clinic, Dr. Russel Lee, offered to sell Palo Alto 1,400 acres he owned in the foothills if the property would be used as a park and remain undeveloped. The City Council quickly agreed, made a \$150,000 down payment and placed a spending measure on the ballot.

Then, the trouble started. The main complaint was that the land, adjacent to Los Altos Hills and miles from most of Palo Alto, would actually be used primarily by wealthy Los Altans, whose town fathers had expressed no interest whatsoever in paying anything for