

## Little kids' playground, Mitchell Park, Palo Alto, California, circa 1967

Photograph by J.L. Groffie. Annotations and text by Frank Groffie.



Zoom in to see the details in this photo. A lot of what you see here is easily identifiable. There's a wooden bridge that crosses over a sort of "moat" of sand. The concrete border of the sand "box" went undulating in all sorts of directions. There's a swing set in the distance to the west.

The things that need explaining are several. First, notice the small, orange-yellow, boxy structure. That tiny building housed the bathrooms: girls on the left side; boys on the right. The two concrete bears were, for all I know, a one-off: I've seen nothing like them elsewhere. They were made of concrete but were polished smooth. One bear lay on its back. I can still dimly recall, sitting on the upright bear, the sense of mass contained within a large object made of rock. The barbecue smoke is blowing east/southeastward, as it would on a typical summer day.

The climbing+slide structure was a sort of steel cage with internal stairways.

The wading pool was an attraction for several years. It was larger than it looks in this photo: it spanned maybe 600 sq. ft., in an irregular amoeba-like shape. It was quite shallow, however: something like 10 to 16 inches deep. I recall getting immense enjoyment from it. I discovered that I could run across it by lifting my legs to the side with each stride. Starting at some time, the pool began to be closed for longer and longer periods, due to maintenance troubles, i.e., something to do with the plumbing.

The tiny pedal cars were an attraction when they were available. Their tiny garages were opened, and the cars let out, only at certain times on certain days. The cars had four wheels, and a steering wheel controlled the front wheels. There was a small circuitous route on which we kids were allowed to drive the cars.

"Mole city", as I'll call it, was a warren of tunnels made of concrete. There were one or two(?) horizontal entrances, one of which is shown here, and two or three vertical entrances.

This playground and Mitchell Park overall were built, I'm pretty confident, in the mid 1950s. Their architects were a talented bunch. Beyond this playground scene, Mitchell Park contained a roller skating ring, several more picnic areas, a giant grass play field, a recreation building containing carrom tables, horseshoe pits, etc.