

“THE DISH” ON SILICON VALLEY

By Bill Fink

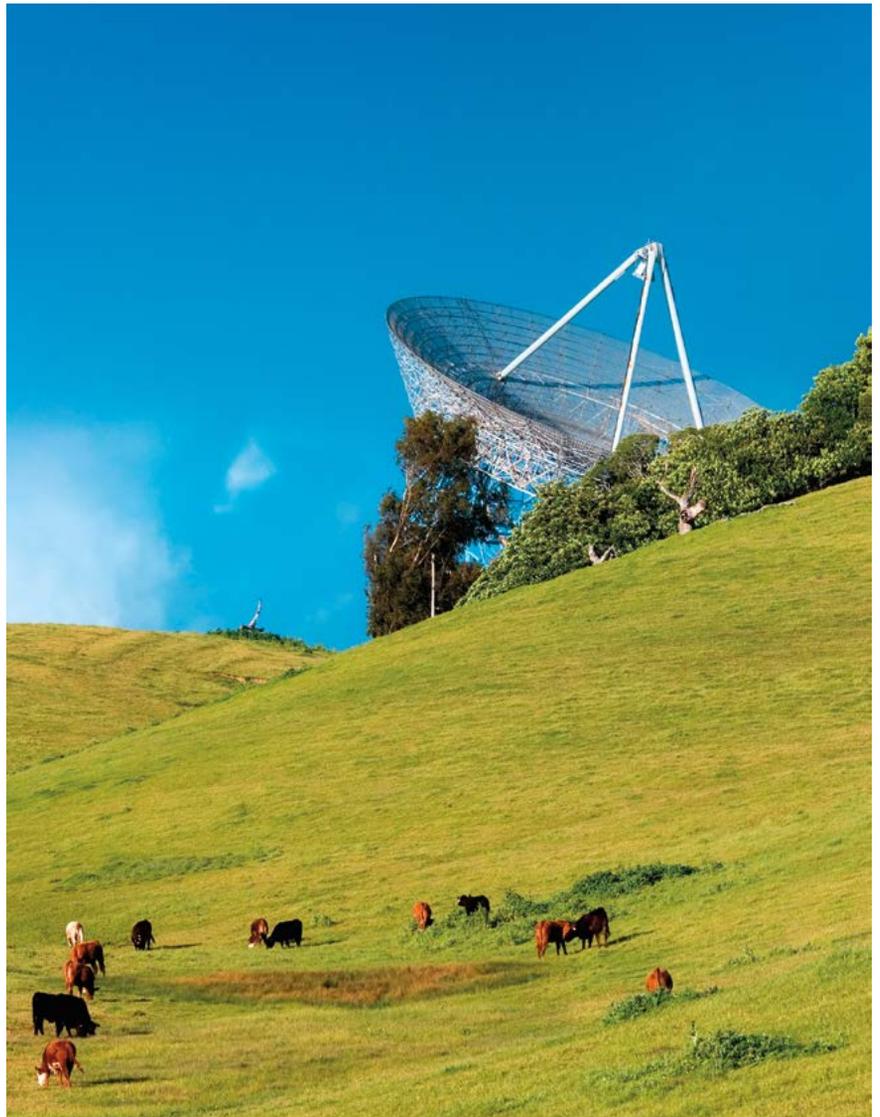
» In bright California sunshine, I walk uphill on a path through grassy fields, past split-rail fences and then under a canopy of oaks. Cows stare at me as they chew their cud. My view could be from a painting of 19th century California ranchland, except for one key detail: the 50-ton radiotelescope towering above me.

I'm on the Stanford Dish trail above Palo Alto, named for the high-tech tool built in 1961 by the Stanford Research Institute and still in use today. The research area is fenced off, but you can still get a good look at the impressive lattice-metal structure. And the trail that passes it provides a great overview of Silicon Valley, both literally and figuratively.

The hundreds of acres of open space surrounding The Dish offer a peek at the valley before the word *silicon* was added, when there were endless ranches and fruit orchards. Livestock still graze here periodically. To the west, forested hills point the way to the Pacific.

Looking east from The Dish area offers a different vista: an expansive view of modern Silicon Valley, anchored by Stanford University with its iconic structure, Hoover Tower. Traditionally known as The Farm, Stanford's campus still boasts open spaces, but it is also packed with a maze of buildings named for (and funded by) icons of technology in Silicon Valley and beyond.

Farther east, on the shores of San Francisco Bay, another campus is visible—once my old workplace of Sun Microsystems, it's now the headquarters of Facebook, a modern internet star that continues to help reshape its corner of the economy. While remaining Bay Area pastures stay largely the same, the corporate environment changes often.



As the paths looping around The Dish reveal vantages on the area's geographical landscape, they also offer perspectives on the distinctive human ecosystem that powers Silicon Valley. The well-trafficked trails can reveal snippets of conversations between anyone from venture capitalists out for a stroll to tech workers on break, to Stanford students, any of whom could be chatting as I imagine Larry Page and Sergey Brin once might have done about plans for what would become Google.

It is appropriate that a hike in one of the world's most famous tech centers culminates at a tangible piece of technology. But amid all the high-tech energy, and sur-

rounded by the shiny corporate headquarters, the cows keep chewing their cud, as they have historically—a reminder to visitors that even here you can take time, slow down and enjoy some sunshine. **AB**

“THE DISH” DETAILS

- Main Loop Trail: 3.5 miles, paved, about 1.5 hours brisk walking time.
- Entrances: Alpine Gate (add 1.5 miles to main loop), Stanford Avenue Gate, Gerona Gate. The area is open to recreational visitors from about sunrise to sunset. Hours vary monthly.
- Learn more at dish.stanford.edu.