

Introduction

ALTHOUGH KNOWN TO Californians as the North Coast, the shoreline between the Golden Gate and the Oregon border lies squarely at the center of the continent's Pacific coast. The range of environments available to coastal visitors reflects this middle location. Soft white sand and coarse pebbles, Sitka spruce and California poppies, roadless areas and campgrounds, redwood glades and pygmy forests; all find their place on California's North Coast.

The climate of coastal Northern California is moderate, with a strong marine influence. Average afternoon temperatures typically fluctuate only about 10 degrees Fahrenheit between winter and summer, and in any season the spread between day and night may be only 15 degrees or less. Even though sun and fog may play hide-and-seek on summer afternoons, microclimate is everything; there are plenty of coves and sheltered beaches where building sandcastles is the logical pursuit, while protected waters in rivers and lagoons draw swimmers and kayakers. Wetsuited surfers ride the waves, while clam diggers burrow in mudflats, and hikers explore miles of trails. This guide is an introduction to a nearly endless range of coastal experiences available to visitors.

The California Coastal Commission, along with sister state agencies including the State Coastal Conservancy, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Fish and Game, is charged with conserving, enhancing, and making available to the public the beaches, accessways, and resources of the coast. The Coastal Commission's responsibilities include providing the public with an informative and educational guide to coastal resources and maintaining an inventory of paths, trails, and other shoreline accessways that are available to the public. Along with the previously published *California Coastal Resource Guide* and the

California Coastal Access Guide, this book furthers those purposes.

This Guide tells you where to go on the North Coast, how to get there, what facilities and coastal resources you will find, and what you might do at each location. It is meant for all coastal visitors—picnickers, hikers, campers, surfers, divers, wheelchair-users, birders, boaters, anglers—and is intended to introduce the richness and diversity of the California coast. This book includes a comprehensive list of beaches, parks, and paths to the shoreline, some 350 in all. Most are publicly owned or controlled, while others are privately managed but available to all users. Use your public tidelands and beaches, but respect private property; do not trespass.

The book also lists commercial recreational outfitters and guides, including fishing boat services, kayak rentals, and equestrian facilities. An effort has been made to be as comprehensive as possible in describing these enterprises, but businesses may change. Call ahead to make sure the recreational offerings you seek are available. The editors welcome additions for inclusion in future editions (see p. 300).

A coastal visit has added dimension with an overnight stay, and this guide lists hostels, campgrounds in state and local parks, and, as space permits, private campground facilities. Campsites in public or private parks include family camps, group camps, sites with RV hook-ups, walk-in environmental campsites, hike or bike sites, and enroute (overflow) spaces. Many can be reserved in advance, while others are available to those who come first. In some areas, such as along the lower Klamath River in Del Norte County, private campgrounds and RV facilities are too numerous to be listed here individually, and visitors are instead directed to clearinghouses such as the lo-



Doran Beach Regional Park, Sonoma County

cal chambers of commerce. Information about market-rate hotels, inns, and eating establishments is available in numerous other guidebooks.

Enjoy your visits to California's magnificent North Coast. Keep safe by observing posted restrictions along hazardous stretches of shoreline. Keep in mind that sleeper waves are a constant factor on the Northern California coast; when strolling the beach or checking out tidepools, do not turn your back on the ocean, and be aware that occasional out-sized waves

may wash over what look like safe spots on rocks and bluffs.

Natural conditions along the California coast are always changing, and the width of beaches and shape of bluffs can be altered by the seasonal movement of sand or by erosion. Coastal access and recreation facilities can be damaged by these forces, and from time to time, trails, stairways, parking areas, and other facilities may be closed for repairs. When planning any trip to the coast, but especially right after a storm, it is advisable to check

For general information on state parks, including a list of camping and day-use fees and campgrounds available without a reservation, see www.parks.ca.gov.

For state park camping reservations: call 1-800-445-7275 (available 24 hours), or see <http://www.reserveamerica.com>.

For other camping opportunities, see individual entries that follow.

For information on Hostelling International's facilities, see www.hiayh.org.

ahead to make sure that the coastal area you choose to visit is currently accessible and usable. Also be aware that some facilities, such as park visitor centers, may be run by volunteers and are open only limited hours; call ahead to check open times. Facilities such as running water are limited or not available at some parks and shoreline accessways; it is a good idea on a coastal trip to bring water, food, waterless hand cleaner, and perhaps one more layer of clothing than you expect to need. Much of the area covered by this guidebook is rural in nature, and only very limited public transit options are listed here.

Dogs enjoy coastal outings just as their human companions do, but their naturally inquisitive nature can create hazards for coastal wildlife. In state parks, dogs must be kept on leashes no longer than six feet and in a tent or enclosed vehicle at night. Except for guide dogs, pets are not allowed in state park buildings, on trails, or on most beaches. Although allowed in some county beach parks, dogs may be subject to leash requirements. See individual site descriptions for more information. Please observe posted signs regarding dogs on trails and beaches and in parks.

Snowy plovers are a threatened species of sparrow-sized shorebirds whose habitat includes beaches and dunes that are also attractive to humans. During the breeding season in spring to late summer, snowy plovers lay well-camouflaged eggs in sand nests, where they are subject to disturbance by beach visitors or dogs, or to predation by ravens attracted by careless trash disposal by humans. The snowy plover is a key link in the interconnected web of life along the coast. Please observe signs and temporary beach closures intended to protect the habitat of this species.

In the words of the California Coastal Act, the purpose of this guide is to contribute to a better understanding by the public of the importance of coastal resources, both to the quality of life for people and to the maintenance of a healthy and productive natural environment. This book is offered with the knowledge that a wide appreciation among Californians for the coast plays an important role in the protection and restoration of coastal resources.



Stinson Beach, Marin County

Using this guide

Each group of sites is accompanied by a map and a chart that summarizes key facilities and characteristics. The “Facilities for Disabled” chart category includes wheelchair-accessible restrooms, trails, campsites, or visitor centers; text descriptions note where restrooms are *not* wheelchair-accessible. The “Fee” chart category refers to a charge for either entry, parking, or overnight use at a facility. Most parks and recreational outfitters maintain websites, but URL addresses may change and space here is limited; use any popular search engine to locate websites for more information on many of the parks and facilities listed in this guide.

Brief introductions to some of the coast’s major environments, such as beaches, rocky shoreline, and the redwood forest, are included in this volume, along with highlights of plants, animals, and birds that you may see there. For more information on the resources of the California coast, consult sources listed in the Bibliography (p. 308) or Suggestions for Further Reading (p. 310).

Sandy Beach
Rocky Shore
Trail
Visitor Center
Campground
Wildlife Viewing
Historic Building
Fishing or Boating
Facilities for Disabled
Restrooms
Parking
Fee



Building a sandcastle

Caring for the Coast

WITH ITS ASTONISHING beauty and bounty of recreational opportunities, California's coastline enriches our lives. We can express our appreciation for this largesse and contribute to the continuing good health of the coast by being good coastal stewards.

A coastal steward understands how his or her everyday choices can impact the coast, and strives to act in ways that will have beneficial results. Here are some examples of coastal stewardship practices. For more ideas and to take the Coastal Stewardship Pledge, call 1-800-COAST-4U or visit www.coastforyou.org.

Stash Your Trash

Litter isn't just ugly, it can kill. Each year, thousands of marine animals die from encounters with human debris—by becoming entangled in waste such as fishing line and plastic strapping, or by ingesting plastic bags and other debris.

Where does beach debris come from? It may have been left by a beachgoer, but most likely it traveled from miles away, having floated there on a tide, washed up from a stream or storm drain outfall, or blown there on a strong wind. Regardless of where it came from, each piece of beach trash was, at some point, handled by a human who didn't dispose of it properly. Sometimes it's an accident—a paper cup placed in an overflowing garbage can falls on the ground, gets washed down the gutter, through the storm drain and out onto the beach. Sometimes it's intentional, as when someone stubs a cigarette butt out on a city street.

Be a coastal steward by not littering, and by practicing the three "Rs"—**reduce** the waste you generate, purchase **reusable** items, and **recycle** trash when possible. Volunteer for a beach cleanup activity such as Coastal Cleanup Day each September or the year-round Adopt-A-Beach Program.



Volunteers record the types of trash found on the beach on a data card. The data helps guide solutions to the marine debris problem.



By walking on bare rock only, this tidepooler is observing correct tidepool etiquette.

Tidepool Etiquette

North Coast tidepools offer the opportunity to see fascinating marine creatures at close range. Tidepool plants and animals, however, are very sensitive to human contact. When visiting tidepools:

- Watch where you step. Step only on bare rock or sand.
- Don't touch any living organisms. A coating of slime protects most tidepool animals. Touching them with dry hands can damage them.
- Don't prod or poke tidepool animals with a stick. Don't attempt to pry animals off of rocks.
- Leave everything as you found it. Collecting tidepool organisms is illegal in most locations and will kill them. Cutting eelgrass, surfgrass, and sea palm is prohibited.

Watching Wildlife

Observing wild animals in their natural environment is a rare treat that can be

experienced on California's North Coast. To ensure that the encounter results in no harm to either the animal or the human observer, we recommend following the guidelines noted below (adapted from the Alliance for Marine Parks and Aquariums and the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association). For additional information, visit www.coastforyou.org and click on How Can I Help.

- **Keep your distance.** Maintain enough distance so that the animal is not aware of you. One hundred yards is a good rule of thumb, although some animals require 200 yards or more. If your presence causes an animal to change its behavior—even if it just looks at you—you should move away immediately. Use binoculars or zoom lenses for a close-up look.
- **Watch quietly and limit the time spent observing animals.** Encounters with people can be stressful to animals. Half an hour is reasonable.
- **Stay clear of mothers with young.** Nests, dens, and rookeries are especially vulnerable to human disturbance.

- **Resist the temptation to “save” animals.** If an animal appears sick, get professional help. In Del Norte and Humboldt Counties, contact the North Coast Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Center: 707-465-MAML. From Mendocino to San Luis Obispo County, contact the Marine Mammal Center: 415-289-SEAL.

- **Never surround an animal.** Avoid approaching wildlife directly and always leave an escape route.

- **Keep pets on a leash or leave them at home.**

- **NEVER FEED WILD ANIMALS.**

Report illegal poaching (or polluting) to the authorities: call 1-888-DFG-CALTIP. The program is confidential and you may be eligible for a reward.

Sensible Seafood Choices

Increasing consumer demand for seafood has led to overfishing. Some fishing practices destroy habitat and harm non-target fish and animals. Use your purchasing power to support healthy oceans by selecting seafoods that are harvested in a

sustainable and environmentally responsible manner. This website offers a pocket guide to sensible seafood choices:

www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp

Whale Tail License Plate

California drivers can help the coast by purchasing a Whale Tail License Plate. The plate funds coastal access trails, beach cleanups, and marine education throughout California, including grants to local groups. Call (800) COAST-4U, or visit www.ecoplates.com.

Nonpoint Source Pollution

Another way that people can affect the health of the coast is through non-point source pollution. Non-point source pollutants are carried to the ocean by storm-water runoff. Individuals can minimize their contribution to this problem by taking simple actions, for example, picking up after their dog, using least-toxic gardening products, and maintaining their car so there are no oil leaks.



Harbor seals