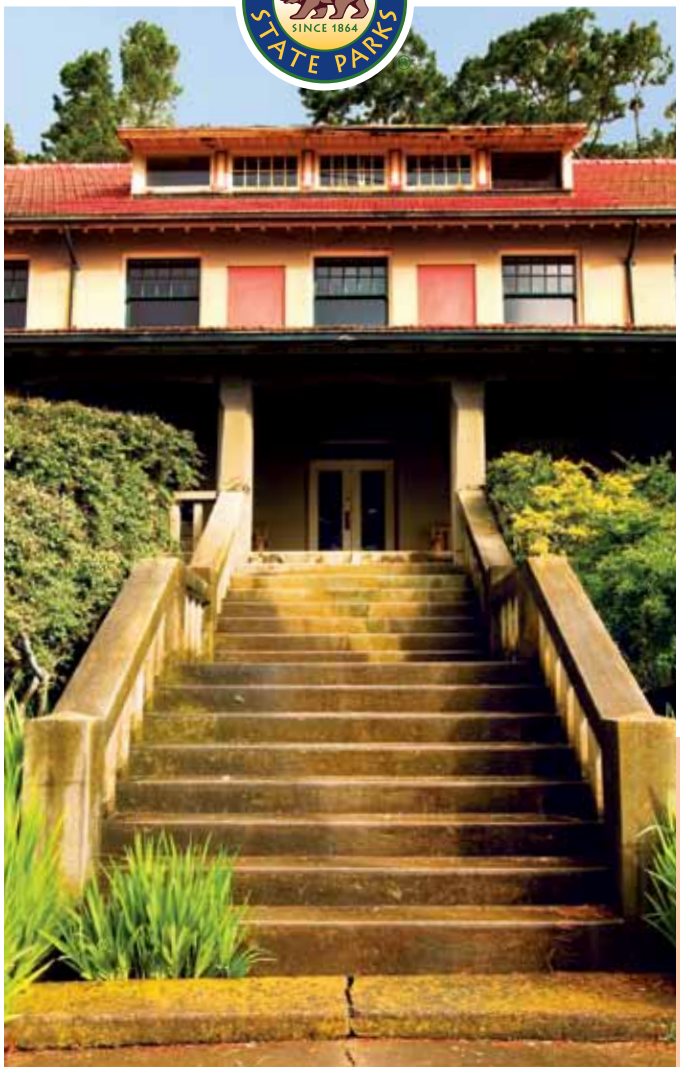
Marconi Conference Center

State Historic Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (415) 663-9020. This publication can be made available in alternate formats. Contact **interp@parks.ca.gov** or call (916) 654-2249.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
For information call: (800) 777-0369
(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.
711, TTY relay service

www.parks.ca.gov

Discover the many states of California.™

Marconi Conference Center
State Historic Park
18500 State Highway One
Marshall, CA 94940
(415) 663-9020
www.parks.ca.gov/marconi

© 2014 California State Parks

History and nature blend seamlessly at the Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park, where native Coast Miwok, global radio communication, and a controversial cult have each left their mark.

This bayside retreat in northern Marin County has a rich and controversial history. Originally occupied by Coast Miwok people, the site was then chosen as part of a history-making global communication chain. Seven of Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park's 62 acres have been designated a historic district, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The site later became world headquarters to a renowned cult, best known for its tough-love drug rehabilitation and an attempted murder. Today, it is a popular conference center and meeting place.

The park enjoys a Mediterranean climate: pleasant springtimes and autumns followed by cool, wet winters. Low-lying fog and offshore breezes from the northwest moderate the summer heat.

PARK HISTORY

Coast Miwok

The indigenous Coast Miwok lived in the area of Tomales Bay for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. When English explorer Francis Drake landed on the Marin peninsula in 1579, the chaplain of his *Golden Hind* galleon noted the friendliness of the native people in his diary.

The Miwok's second European encounter came in 1595. Captain Sebastian Cermeño's Manila galleon, the *San Agustin*, sank in what is now called Drake's Bay with a cargo of Ming Dynasty porcelain. The wreckage is thought to be buried beneath the bay. The local Coast Miwok retrieved and used pieces of the Ming porcelain for tools and ornaments; shards of it wash up on the beach to this day.

A Coast Miwok tribal village stood about two miles south of today's town of Marshall, near the conference center. The village was called *etkako'lum* in the Miwok dialect of the Penutian language family. Historians estimate more than 3,000 Coast Miwok lived in Marin and Sonoma villages.

Euroamerican Incursion

In 1817, Franciscan missionaries claimed the Marin peninsula and built Mission San Rafael, converting native people to their religion and using them as a labor force. Most Coast Miwok people died from contagious diseases that spread quickly in the missions' close living conditions.

After the missions were secularized (released from religious influence) in 1834, Mexican Governor José Figueroa promised to the surviving Miwok an 80,000-acre land grant at Nicasio—from Tomales Bay to today's San Geronimo. Meant as reparation for the loss of their tribal lands, this property was never formally deeded to the Miwok people.

After years of delay, General Mariano Vallejo granted this land to five Miwok members on October 14, 1844. The next day, Vallejo's nephew, former California governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, "bought" the land grant from these Miwok owners. The Miwok signed a deed in return for Vallejo's promise to pay them $1,000. The Miwok never received their money, nor did they know that two months before, then-Governor Manuel Micheltorena had legally granted most of this promised land to two other people.

Rocky, steep, undesirable land at Graton in Sonoma County was eventually given to the Miwok, but some surviving tribe members chose to labor for others at Nicasio. Others lived in nearby houses built on pilings over Tomales Bay, selling harvested shellfish to make ends meet.

Coast Miwok and some Southern Pomo formed the Federated Coast Miwok in 1992. This blended tribe's federal recognition was officially restored as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria in 2000. Today's members, all descended from the original tribes, honor the homeland of their ancestors and work to revive the Miwok language and customs for future generations.

Coast Miwok tule boat, 1815

Courtesy of The Bancroft Library

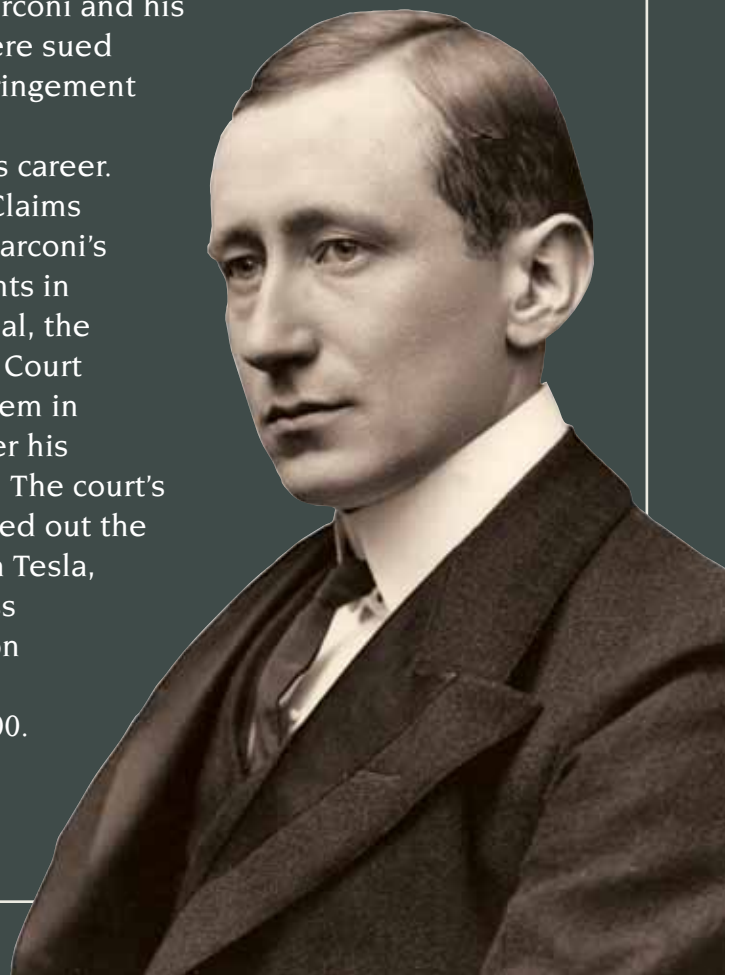
GUGLIELMO MARCONI (1874 - 1937)

In 1896, at age 22, Guglielmo Marconi received the first radio patent on his wireless system, using electromagnetic waves to transmit telegraphic messages. Building upon prior discoveries by Heinrich Hertz, Nikola Tesla, Thomas Edison and others, this young Italian demonstrated that coded signal telegraphy could be conducted without wires running from transmitter to receiver.

Marconi's youthful experiments began at his childhood home in Bologna, Italy. He expanded upon Hertz's and Tesla's apparatuses, transmitting radio signals (called Hertz waves at the time) at increasing lengths. Marconi persisted until he had significantly raised radio signal-transmission distances. Propounded in 1897, Marconi's Law held that the maximum signal distance between sending and receiving antennas of equal height is proportional to the square of the antennas' height, using a constant minimum value of current (i.e., Height = Constant x √Distance). Unlike the radio-wave pioneers who preceded Marconi, he put their theories into practice with regular commercial operation, ultimately achieving his goal of transoceanic communication.

Proving that the earth's curvature would not interfere, he was able to transmit the first transatlantic radio signals for a distance of 2,100 miles from Cornwall, England, to St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1901. Marconi shared the 1909 Nobel Prize for Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun "in recognition for their contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy."

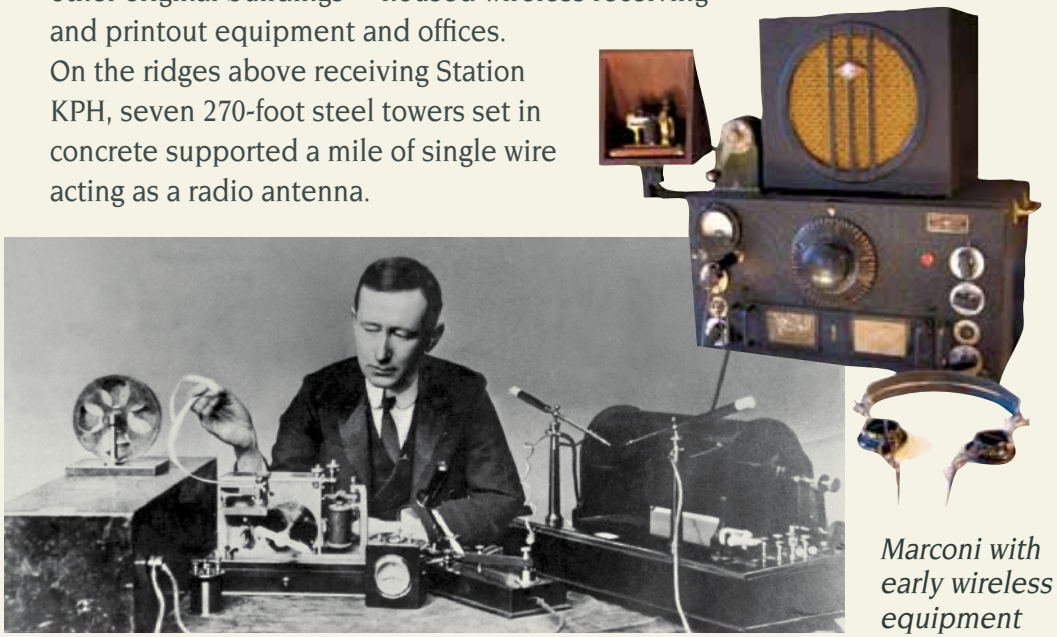
Despite his important individual contributions that built on the work of others, Guglielmo Marconi and his companies were sued for patent-infringement several times throughout his career. The Court of Claims invalidated Marconi's wireless patents in 1935; on appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned them in 1943, long after his death in 1937. The court's decision singled out the work of Nikola Tesla, whose wireless communication patent was granted in 1900.



MESSAGES AROUND THE WORLD

Long-wave wireless radio required two "duplex" sending and receiving stations to be built miles apart because the long-wave wireless static noise of 300-kilowatt transmission interfered with clear reception. The Marconi Wireless Company moved Station KPH, a high-powered wireless transmitting station, from San Francisco's Palace Hotel to land near Bolinas. In 1912, the company purchased 1,114 acres near Marshall from dairy farmer E.G. Maggetti for the signal-receiving station site. The two sites joined four other U.S. duplex receiving and transmitting stations—located in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian Territory. Together, the stations created the first dependable communication link between ships at sea, the Continental United States, Hawaii and Japan.

The company hired J.G. White, a New York engineering company, to design and construct the five historic structures at the Marshall receiving station in 1913 and 1914. The original complex had a luxurious 35-room residence for staff and families, two cottages for the chief engineer and the assistant, an operations building, and a powerhouse for electric transformers and batteries. The three-story residence (now closed), the one-story Pinecrest and Bayview cottages, and the powerhouse overlook Tomales Bay from their knoll. The operations building—built far from the other original buildings—housed wireless receiving and printout equipment and offices. On the ridges above receiving Station KPH, seven 270-foot steel towers set in concrete supported a mile of single wire acting as a radio antenna.



Marconi with early wireless equipment

Receiving station KPH, ca. 1920s

Marconi realized his dream of a "wireless girdle 'round the earth" with his radiotelegraph system. Radio telegraphy gained credibility after the 1912 rescue of more than 700 *RMS Titanic* passengers.

The Great War (World War I) broke out in Europe in 1914, and control of similar duplex wireless stations in Ireland, Wales and Russia was seized by their respective countries' governments. As the only company capable of transatlantic radio and telegraph communications, Marconi Wireless Company's wireless stations in the United States were all confiscated by the U.S. Navy in 1917. After the war, keeping such equipment in American hands became a priority. Because Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America was owned by a British parent company, U.S. naval officials urged General Electric Company (GE) to acquire the American Marconi Company's transatlantic assets.

In 1919, GE formed the Radio Corporation of America (RCA); that corporation's bylaws specified that all of RCA's directors and officers must be U.S. citizens. RCA then merged with American Marconi, so the duplex stations at Marshall and Bolinas became RCA property.

RCA sold all but these 62.4 acres at Marshall in 1922. A new short-wave receiving station was built at Point Reyes in 1929, yet Station KPH continued to operate here at Tomales until the start of World War II. RCA sold the remaining acreage in 1947; eventually, the Marshall site was sold for $175,000 to the Synanon Foundation in 1964.

CONTROVERSY

The Marshall site became the world headquarters for Synanon, which had originated in Southern California as a rehabilitation program for drug addicts in 1958. The term Synanon was accidentally coined by an addict mispronouncing the words "seminar" and "symposium." The name stuck.

Synanon's founder, reformed alcoholic Charles Dederich, had been living on unemployment checks when he developed a following of self-proclaimed "dope fiends," who were not welcome in alcohol-recovery programs. At first, Dederich took addicts who were trying to get clean into his Santa Monica apartment, scrounging food from grocery stores to feed them.

As Dederich's following grew, donations poured in; the group started purchasing property throughout the U.S. Working residents signed their paychecks over to the "nonprofit" group. Synanon Industries was launched, operating businesses from gas stations to repair shops to promotional item sales—earning about $10 million annually at Synanon's zenith.

Synanon's initial publicity promised addicts a lifelong cure from drug dependence after completing a two-year residential program. The core of their rehabilitation process was the "Synanon Game," a fiercely confrontational group therapy that developed after Dederich had ridiculed a gathering of his loyal followers. In the Game, about a dozen members humiliated and picked on one another in turn, with brutal honesty and self-revelation as the Game's sole reward.

Synanon's public meetings generated more publicity. Attendees came from all social classes and professions—including a brigade of lawyers—who donated time, goods and funds to Synanon. Many were not addicts, merely "squares" (non-Synanon members) and celebrities curious about the communal lifestyle and the Synanon Game.

An estimated 6,000 to 10,000 people passed through Synanon's program. After most of its residency graduates returned to substance abuse, Synanon declared itself an "alternative lifestyle community" in 1968, admitting to cult status and requiring devotees to remain with Synanon for life. Dederich had members shave their heads; he chose their partners and even dictated their reproductive rights.

Between 1964 and 1980, Synanon members constructed the residences, warehouse, a geodesic dome, medical clinic, gym, firehouse, airstrip and dump at the Marshall site. When authorities tried to enforce ignored building-permit and taxation laws, Synanon amended its incorporation status to become tax-exempt as the Church of Synanon. At its 1975 peak, the Church claimed 1,700 members worldwide.

A local Marin newspaper, *The Point Reyes Light*, started a 1978 investigative series focusing on children who had run away from Synanon. A Marin County grand jury probe found that Synanon had transformed from a narcotics-treatment program to a "materialistic autocracy."

Synanon-era top-floor door

Other media outlets began their own investigations, so Dederich responded by bringing lawsuits. The legal discovery process led to Synanon's downfall after prosecutors found Dederich's taped recordings ordering brutal beatings and an attempted murder.

On October 10, 1978, two members removed the warning rattles from a 4.5-foot rattlesnake and placed it in an opposing attorney's mailbox. Paramedics saved the bitten man's life, but Dederich (found drunk in Arizona) and two accomplices were all convicted of conspiracy to commit murder. In 1978 the court ordered Dederich to abdicate his role as Synanon's head.

The Point Reyes Light won a 1979 Pulitzer Prize for its role in exposing Synanon. The Church of Synanon collapsed and disbanded; Synanon properties were either sold or seized by the government. Some former members opened their own "tough-love" rehab programs.

A Bay Area philanthropic organization, the San Francisco Foundation, bought the Marshall property in 1980; four years later, they deeded it to the California State Parks Foundation. The Foundation transferred the land to the State in 1989, for use as a retreat and conference center.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology

The Marconi Conference Center lies on the north end of Bolinas ridge along the Marin Peninsula, adjoining Tomales Bay. Some time after the Pleistocene glacial epoch, the bay was formed by rising sea waters along the active San Andreas fault line, which runs through Tomales Bay to Bolinas. The soils here are decomposed bedrock: serpentine, shale, chert and sandstone.

Plants

The area's native coastal terrace prairies were grazed grassland when the Marconi Company bought the land—ideal for erecting towers to receive long radio waves.

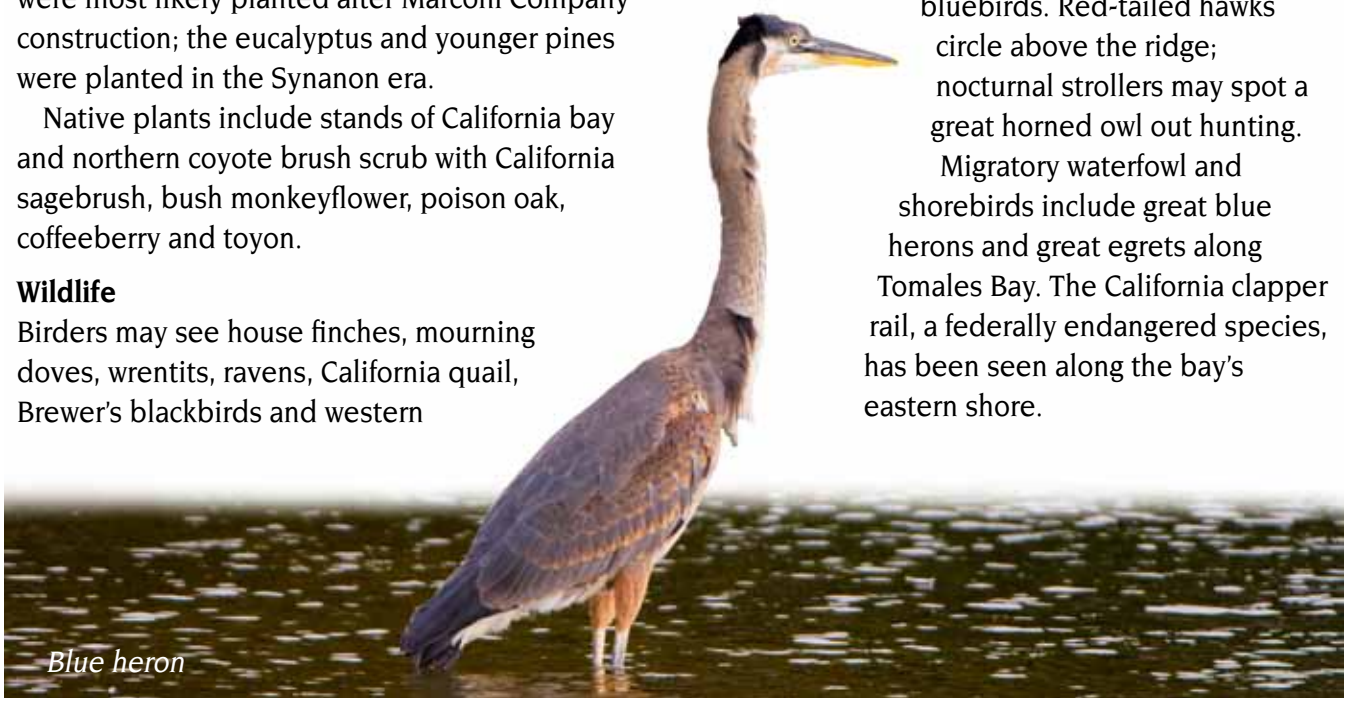
Today's vegetation communities are closed-cone pine forest, eucalyptus, coastal scrub and annual grassland. The older Monterey pine trees were most likely planted after Marconi Company construction; the eucalyptus and younger pines were planted in the Synanon era.

Native plants include stands of California bay and northern coyote brush scrub with California sagebrush, bush monkeyflower, poison oak, coffeeberry and toyon.

Wildlife

Birders may see house finches, mourning doves, wrentits, ravens, California quail, Brewer's blackbirds and western bluebirds. Red-tailed hawks circle above the ridge; nocturnal strollers may spot a great horned owl out hunting. Migratory waterfowl and shorebirds include great blue herons and great egrets along Tomales Bay. The California clapper rail, a federally endangered species, has been seen along the bay's eastern shore.

Conference center lobby



Blue heron

Common local animals include the black-tailed jackrabbit, brush rabbit, mule deer, California vole, pocket gopher, gray fox and western fence lizard.

CONFERENCE CENTER

The idyllic hillside grounds make an ideal site for retreats and conferences. View details of lodging, meeting and event spaces, and meals on the park website at **www.parks.ca.gov/marconi;** make conference or meeting arrangements by calling (415) 663-9020. Paved and unpaved hiking trails wend through the tranquil setting. Please stay on marked trails and be alert for ticks or poison oak.

EVENTS

In late April of each year, Guglielmo Marconi's April 25 birthday is commemorated at historic Marconi wireless sites around the world. Volunteers from amateur radio station K6KPH, the Maritime Radio Historical Society, celebrate International Marconi Day at both the sending site in Bolinas and the receiving station here at Marshall in the original station manager's cottage, McCargo Hall. Vintage transmitting and receiving equipment is used and displayed. For Marconi Day details, please visit **www.radiomarine.org**.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The park sits on a steep hillside that may challenge some wheelchair users. Some guest rooms, parking, restrooms and the conference halls are accessible, as is the dining hall. Discuss your needs when calling Marconi Conference Center for reservations at (415) 663-9020.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- All animals must be leashed. Except for service animals, no pets are allowed inside the buildings or on grounds overnight. Dogs on leash are allowed on trails during the daytime. Please pick up after your dog.
- Observe fire safety precautions. Smoking, cooking, and burning candles or incense are not allowed in guest rooms.
- Open fires, barbecues and group picnics are not allowed on park grounds.
- The park has no access to Tomales Bay.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Tomales Bay State Park
  1208 Pierce Point Road
  Inverness 94937
  (415) 669-1140
- Samuel P. Taylor State Park
  8889 Sir Francis Drake Blvd.
  Lagunitas 94938
  (415) 488-9897
- Mount Tamalpais State Park
  801 Panoramic Highway
  Mill Valley 94941
  (415) 388-3653
  (415) 388-2070

Marconi Conference Center
State Historic Park

MARCONI CONFERENCE CENTER STATE HISTORIC PARK

N

to Bodega Bay

Tower Hill Trail
Lower Tower Hill Trail
Tower Hill Trail
Antenna Site
Redwood Dining Hall
Meadow Trail
Cypress Lodge
Pine Lodge
Operations Building
Office
Seagull Lodge
Vista Loop Trail
Heron Lodge
Sandpiper Lodge
Pelican Lodge
Conference Trail
McCargo Hall
Forest Trail
Hotel
Meadow Trail
Meadow Trail
South Trail
North Trail
Buck Hall
Bridge Trail
Park Entrance
South Trail
to Point Reyes Station

Tomales Bay

0 200 400 600 Feet
0 50 100 150 Meters

Legend

- Major Road
- Paved Road
- Unpaved/Service Road
- Trail: Hike
- Accessible Pedestrian Path
- Intermittent Stream
- Historic Building
- Park Building
- Accessible Feature
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Viewpoint

© 2014 California State Parks