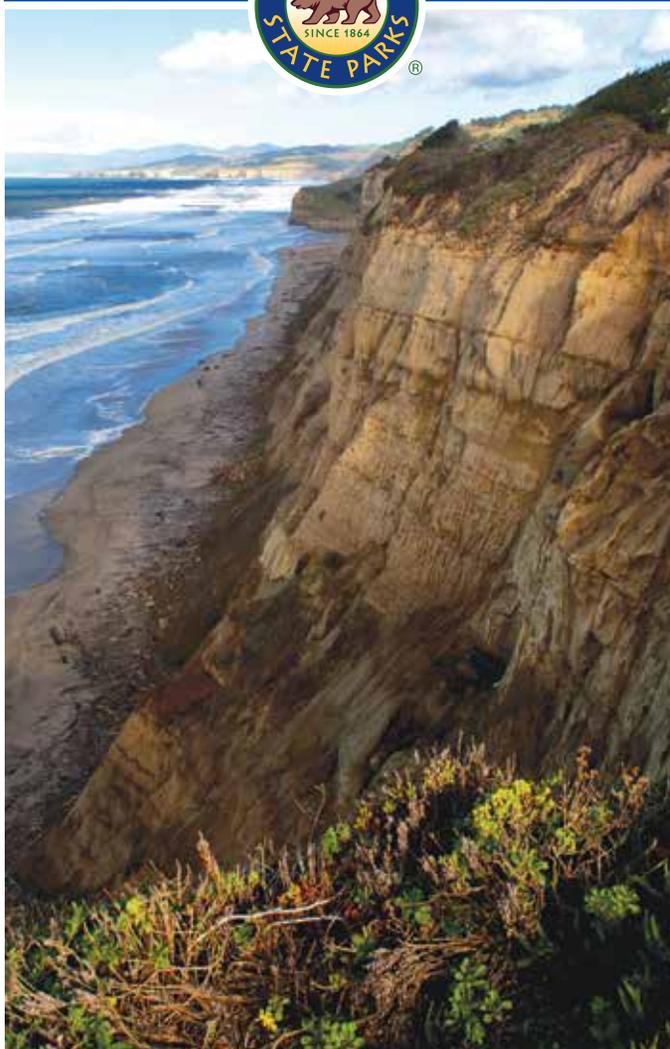


# San Mateo Coast State Beaches



## 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 office at **(650) 726-8819**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

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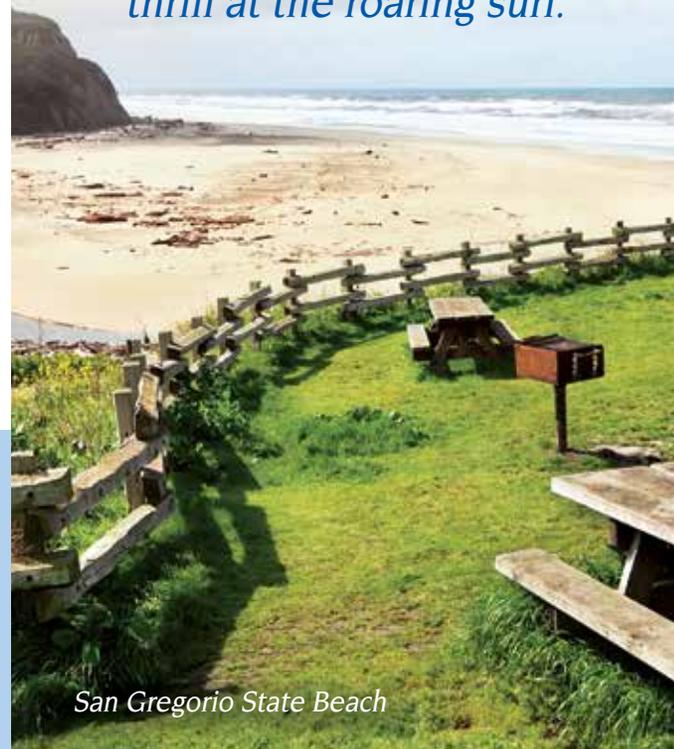
[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

**San Mateo Coast State Beaches**  
Highway 1, Pacifica to Pescadero, CA  
Parks Sector Office: 95 Kelly Avenue  
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 (650) 726-8819

*On the cover: Pomponio State Beach*

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*San Mateo Coast's  
state beaches are dotted  
along 40 miles of steep  
bluffs, sandy beaches,  
and scenic wonders.  
Stroll the shoreline,  
have a picnic, gaze into  
the tide pools, and  
thrill at the roaring surf.*



*San Gregorio State Beach*

**The San Mateo coast encompasses a treasure trove of exquisite landscapes on the 40-mile stretch** from Pacifica to the northern boundary of Santa Cruz County. The wild backcountry and deep canyons of the Santa Cruz Mountains help protect the coast and preserve its natural beauty for millions of visitors each year. The coastline's rich mosaic includes prehistoric fossils, a 19th-century lighthouse, historic ranch structures, and other features reflecting human uses of both terrestrial and marine environments, as well as stunning natural views.

### AREA HISTORY

Native Americans first settled along the California coast during the end of the Great Ice Age, about 14,000 years ago. Over the millennia, they managed the productivity of the plants and animals that they harvested for food and material by systematically burning selected areas, pruning plants, and hand-tending bulb and root gardens. By doing so, they improved the browsing and foraging vegetation that was important to the deer, elk, antelope, bear, rabbit, and other species that the indigenous people hunted and trapped.

Before the arrival of Europeans, several individual tribes controlled territories throughout the San Mateo coast and adjacent mountains—including the Chiguan of today's

Montara area, the Cotegen of Half Moon Bay, the Oljon of San Gregorio, and the Quiroste of the Pescadero, Butano, and Año Nuevo regions. Together, these and some 45 additional tribes located throughout the larger San Francisco and Monterey Bay areas have come to be called the Ohlone people. Today, Ohlone still honor and practice ancient cultural traditions.

Soldier and explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed his ship north along the coastline in 1542. The names that he and later Spanish maritime explorers gave to points along the coast are still in use today. The first Spanish overland expedition to explore Upper California took place in 1769 under the command of Gaspar de Portolá.

Portolá expedition members reported that as they traveled north along the San Mateo coast from Baja California, they were given

food from many Native Americans in villages along the way.

When hunters from the expedition climbed Sweeney Ridge above present-day Pacifica, they became the first Spaniards to see San Francisco Bay. Campsites used by Portolá's explorers at Pacifica, Bean Hollow, and San Gregorio are now state historic landmarks.

Several Spanish missions had cattle ranches in the 1780s; later, wheat, corn, and beans were planted as income crops.

After the Mexican revolution and independence in 1822, the new Mexican government granted large coastal properties to just a few citizens. These included Rancho Butano, Rancho San Gregorio, and Rancho Coral de Tierra, among others.

With the advent of the California gold rush and subsequent statehood in 1850, droves of settlers flocked here. Row crop farms gained momentum when Portuguese and Italian vegetable farmers arrived in the 1870s. Today,



*Half Moon Bay State Beach*

many crops are still grown in the area, including cut flowers, artichokes, and brussels sprouts.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the great redwood forests of San Mateo County were extensively logged. Resort hotels flourished, and on the coastside, tourists reported that both salmon fishing and upland game hunting were outstanding.

## NATURAL HISTORY

### Flora and Fauna

The main coastal attractions are the sandy beaches at the base of moderately high bluffs. Native plant communities include riparian, coastal dunes, coastal bluff scrub, coastal prairie, and both freshwater and saltwater marsh. Non-native vegetation includes eucalyptus groves and grassland. Willows and alders line most of the coastal creeks.



Photo courtesy Tammy Lin

*San Francisco garter snake*

Low dunes host a coastal strand community, including beach bur, yellow sand verbena, prostrate coyote brush, yarrow, and non-native iceplant. Significant species diversity can be found;

many of these parks support sensitive, threatened, or endangered species, including the San Francisco garter snake and California red-legged frog.

Birds nest in the coastal scrub along these beaches, with wrentits and song sparrows among them. Residents include mallards, black phoebes, American coots, warblers, and hawks. Migrating cinnamon teal and buffleheads pause on their travels.

The riparian/marsh habitat is home to raccoons, opossums, shrews, western pond turtles, and Pacific tree frogs.

Broad-handed moles, badgers, and coyotes are found in the area. Sandy and

rocky beaches also attract whimbrels, sanderlings, marbled godwits, willets, black oystercatchers, and various gulls hunting for intertidal invertebrates.

### Geology

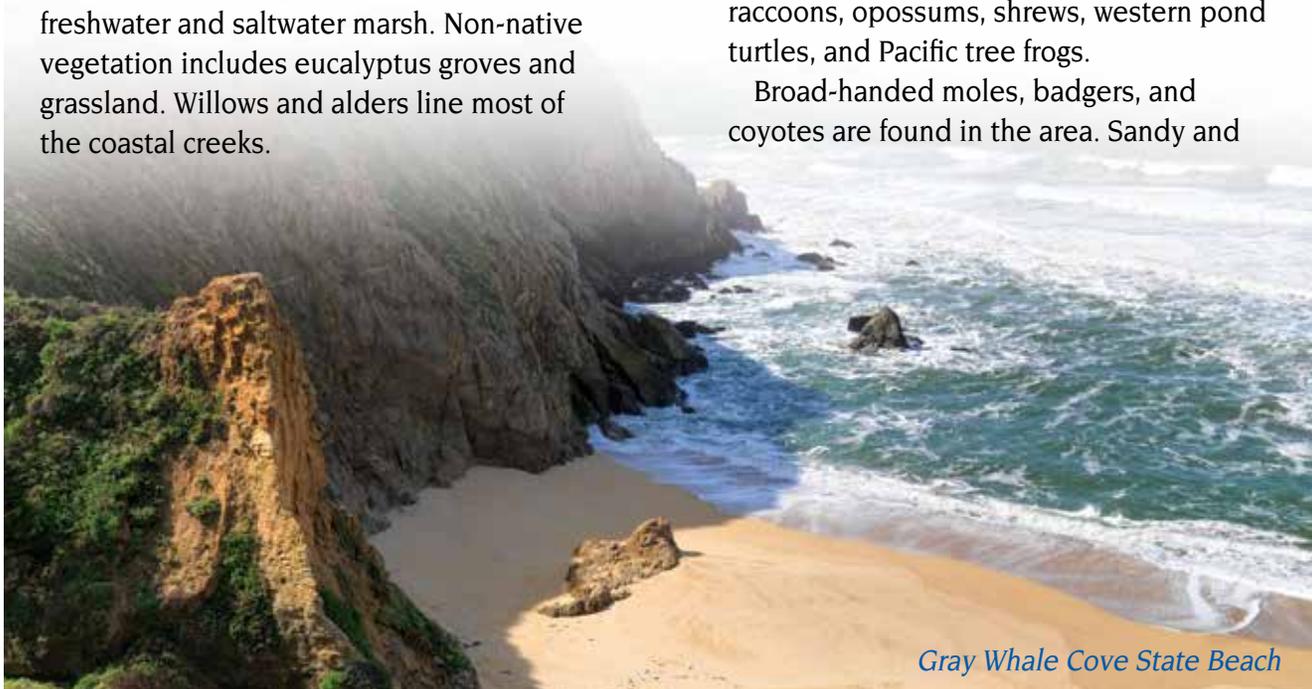
The Seal Cove-San Gregorio fault—a major branch of the San Andreas fault—is the dominant geologic feature in this area. A 100,000-year-old broad marine terrace east of the fault warped downward over time between Montara and Miramontes Point, giving rise to the crescent shape of Half Moon Bay.

Rocks as old as 70 to 150 million years, exposed in the sea cliffs at Gray Whale Cove, once formed the southern extension of the Sierra Nevada. Over the past 30 million years, these rocks have been moved northward about 350 miles along the San Andreas fault.

In the sea cliffs between Seal Cove and Pescadero, marine sandstones from the Purisima Formation (1½ to 5 million years old) are exposed, while in the cliffs between Pescadero and Pigeon Point, pebbly sandstones and mudstones from the 70-million-year-old Pigeon Point Formation are visible. *Tafoni*, small honeycomb-like pits, and the well-rounded pebbles on Pebble Beach are the result of weathering.

The seacliffs are eroding due to surf action and can collapse.

*Use caution on cliff edges. Many of these beaches can be completely flooded during high tides, trapping unwary visitors.*



*Gray Whale Cove State Beach*

## THE BEACHES

### Pacifica State Beach

Linda Mar Beach's wide, day-use-only crescent is operated by the City of Pacifica. Parking fees apply, and California State Parks passes are not accepted.

### Gray Whale Cove State Beach

The 800-foot beach (adjacent to Devil's Slide) is reached via a steep stairway. Gray whales migrate along the coast from December to January and March to May.

### Montara State Beach/McNee Ranch

Montara State Beach is a popular spot for sunbathing, strolling, nature study, and picnicking. Two beach access points from the bluff area lead to the beach.

Inland, the 690-acre McNee Ranch (on Montara Mountain) encompasses coastal mountain habitat with sweeping coastal vistas. The ranch's two-mile Pedro Mountain Trail connects to trails leading to Montara Beach and Gray Whale Cove.

Dogs are allowed on Montara Beach and McNee Ranch only when leashed.



Photo courtesy Merrill Cosho, NOAA

Gray whale

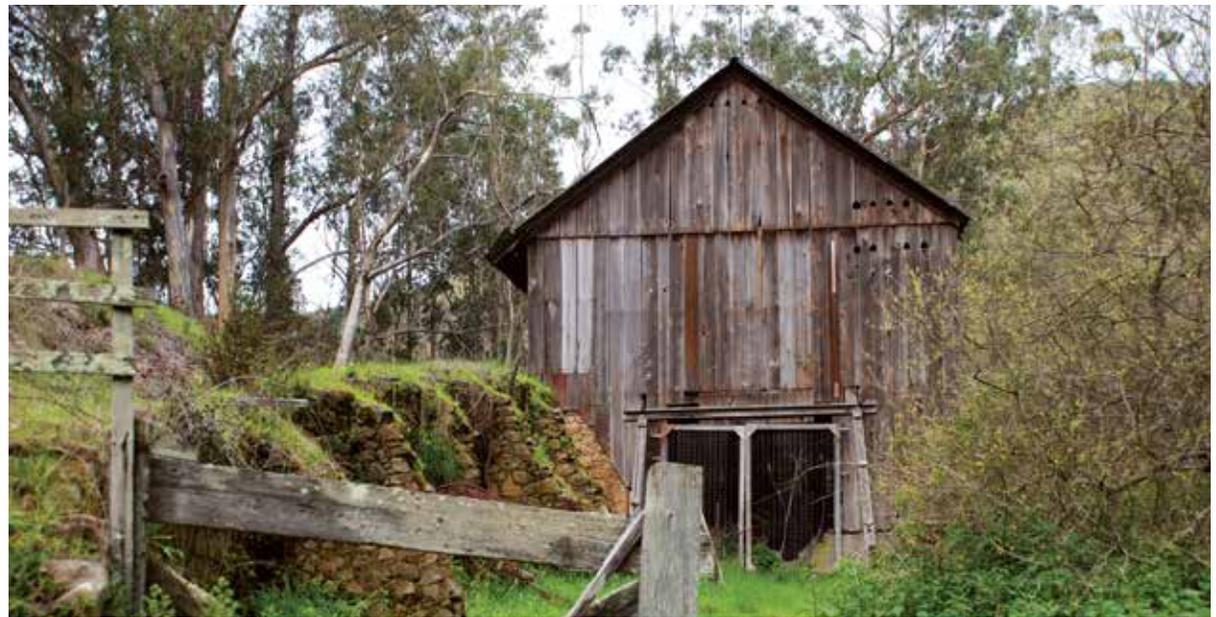


Photo courtesy Avis Boutell

Burleigh H. Murray Ranch bank barn

### Half Moon Bay State Beach

Miles of fine sand include narrow beaches with clear, compelling views. From north to south, the Roosevelt, Dunes, Venice, and Francis Beaches lure visitors. A paved recreational trail retraces the route of the historic Ocean Shore Railroad.

Parking lots are near the beaches. Francis Beach has day-use picnic tables, barbecues, showers, and family tent or RV campsites. Sweetwood Group Camp holds up to 50 people in a tents-only site.

An equestrian trail extends between Venice Beach and Francis Beach. Horses can be rented from a private stable off Highway 1. Horses are restricted to the designated horse trail; they are not permitted on state beaches.

For camping reservations, call (800) 444-7275 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

### Burleigh H. Murray Ranch

A 1.4-mile trail starts at the park entrance off Higgins-Purisima Road and extends east across bridged streams to the Mills Barn, listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

This dairy barn, called a "bank barn" since it is built into a hillside, is California's only known example of an English-style bank barn. No fires or smoking are allowed in this park. Bring your own drinking water. Horses may use the gravel road.

### Cowell Ranch

A half-mile walk into the park takes hikers past farmland to a spot overlooking the sea, and then to a sandy beach with rocky outcrops, high cliffs, and harbor seal viewing opportunities.



*Bean Hollow State Beach  
Right: Starburst anemone*



**Pescadero State Beach/  
Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve**

Seventeen miles south of Half Moon Bay, Pescadero State Beach has two miles of beach, dunes, and rugged outcrops. From the blufftop parking lot north of the Pescadero Road/ Highway 1 intersection, stunning views await visitors.

The 500-acre Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve hosts resident bird species and protects a vital stopping point for migratory species along the Pacific Flyway.

**Bean Hollow State Beach/  
Pebble Beach**

These day-use beaches have a self-guided nature trail. Dogs on leash are allowed here. Do not disturb the tide pool creatures—anemones, crabs, sea urchins, and other marine inhabitants.

In 1987 the property was saved from development by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), which maintains an adjoining 3.6 miles of hike/bike trails to the south.

**San Gregorio State Beach**

Site of the Portolá Expedition campsite in October 1769—now a state historical landmark—San Gregorio State Beach’s mile-long, narrow beach sits at the mouth of San Gregorio Creek.

**Pomponio State Beach**

Pomponio State Beach, named for a Native California Indian who rebelled against the missions, has high sandstone bluffs—some as high as 190 feet.

Day-use amenities at Pomponio and San Gregorio Beaches include barbecues, picnic tables, and vault toilets.

Colorful stones from an offshore gravel bed dating from the Pleistocene era wash in to Pebble Beach: jade, chert, agate, jasper, and moonstone may be found among them. Collecting is not permitted.

For more information about all of these state beaches and parks, visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or call the San Mateo Coast Sector Office at (650) 726-8819.

**EVENTS, WEDDINGS, PHOTOGRAPHY**

Permits must be obtained prior to all beach events and weddings. For permit information, call the San Mateo Coast Sector Office at (650) 726-8815.

Photography for profit on state property requires advance permission. For commercial still and video film-permit information, visit the State’s Film Commission website at <http://film.ca.gov/Permits.htm>.



*Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve*

## WESTERN SNOWY PLOVERS

This small shorebird nests on open, sandy beaches. Plovers rely on stealth and their sand-blended coloring to escape detection from people and predators. If parents sense any threat, they may run or take flight—wasting precious energy reserves and leaving eggs and chicks exposed to predators and the elements. To help these threatened birds survive, avoid posted sensitive areas.



### Marine Protected Areas

Offshore, the Montara State Marine Reserve and the Pillar Point State Marine Conservation Area extend south from Montara. Marine protected areas help conserve ocean wildlife and ecosystems. For boundaries and more information, see <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs>.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

**Half Moon Bay SB**—Camping: Francis Beach Campground has accessible campsites and restrooms. A beach wheelchair may be checked out. Sweetwood Group Camp has accessible parking and a vault toilet.

Accessibility in state parks is continually improving. For updates, visit the website at <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- **The surf is very hazardous due to large sneaker waves, recurring rip currents, and bitterly cold water. Never turn your back on the ocean.**
- **Use extreme caution: lifeguards patrol the length of the coast, but they are not stationed at each beach.**
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Except for trained service animals, dogs are not permitted on most state beaches.

These parks receive support in part through three nonprofit cooperating associations:

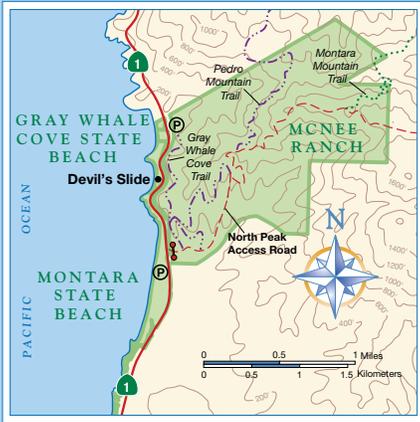
Coastside State Parks Association  
[www.coastsidestateparks.org](http://www.coastsidestateparks.org)

Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks  
[www.thatsmypark.org](http://www.thatsmypark.org)

The Waddell Creek Association  
[www.ranchodeloso.org](http://www.ranchodeloso.org)

# San Mateo Coast

State Beaches and Parks



**Legend**

- Freeway
- Major Road
- Unpaved/Service Road
- Trail: Hike
- Trail: Multi-Use (Hike/Bike/Horse)
- Cultural Preserve (No Public Access)
- Natural Preserve
- State Marine Conservation Area
- State Marine Reserve
- Bridge
- Locked Gate
- Parking

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