

Coast Trail



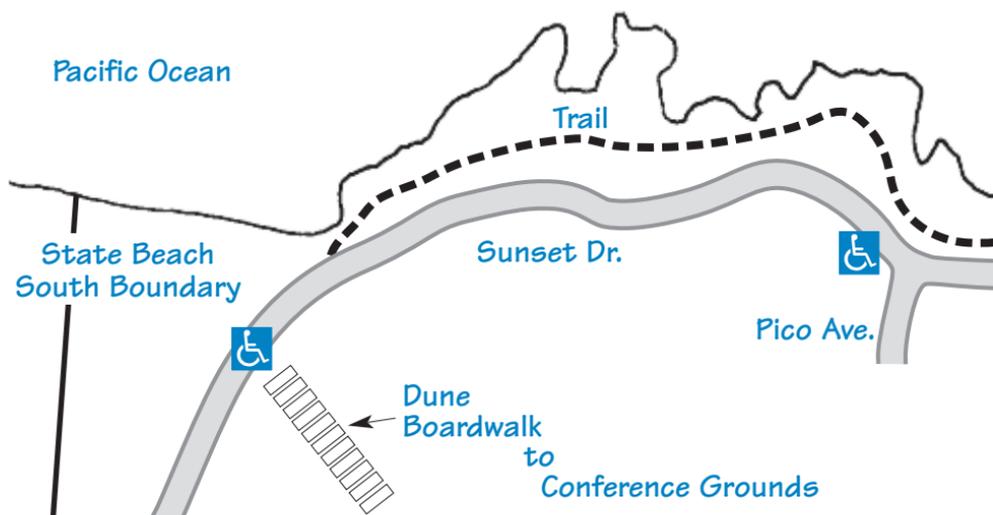
Discover Asilomar



Self-guided walking tour

Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds





Starting Out

You can begin your walk from any location along the Coast Trail. The walk is fairly level; good walking shoes will ensure a comfortable tour.

This guide highlights some of the interesting features seen along the way. There are no specific interpretive stops to locate on the trail; many of the things you will observe can be seen repeatedly from various places.

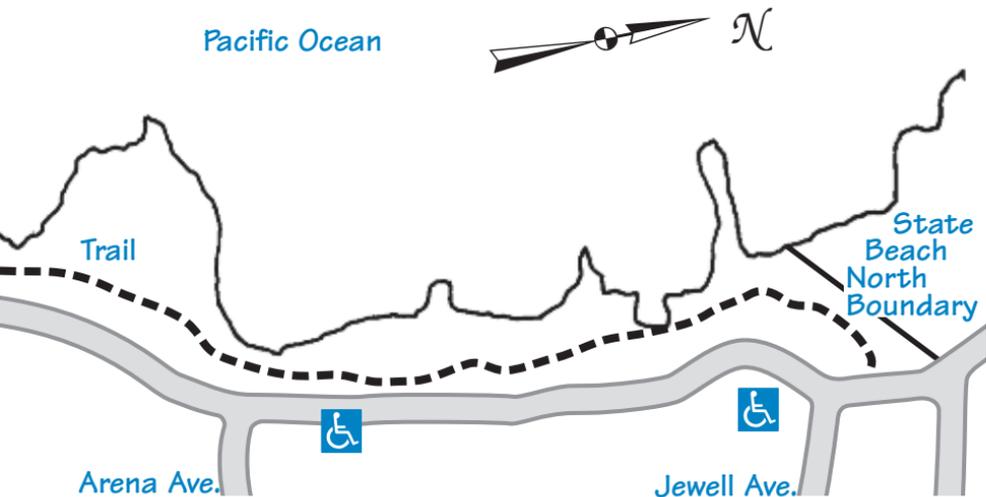
Allow 60 minutes for this Coast Trail walk (round trip). The trail distance is one mile (one-way) from the conference grounds. The trail is accessible to all visitors, including those with special needs.



Accessible parking spaces along Sunset Drive adjoin trail boardwalks and provide wheelchair access at various points along the coast trail.

A beach wheelchair is available. Check with the front desk or call (831) 372-8016.

California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park office. This publication is available in alternate formats and on the Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds website: www.parks.ca.gov.



Preserve and Protect

As you explore, keep in mind that each form of marine life, from sea birds to the smallest invertebrates, finds its own place in the natural web of life. You have the privilege of observing these natural processes when you do not interfere or disturb the wildlife.

Preserve the fragile plant life by staying on the designated trails.

You are responsible not to collect, disturb, or injure dune and marine plants and animals.

You are responsible not to collect shells in the tide pools.

No trampling or collecting in the midden sites.

To safeguard the wildlife that live in the tide pools, we request that park staff accompany all organized groups exploring this area. To schedule staff call (831) 646-6440.

Your actions help maintain this coastal area as a healthy habitat so future visitors may enjoy it.

For Your Safety

When venturing near the water be aware that the waves are unpredictable and can sweep you off the rocks. The cold water and rip currents present additional dangers. Caution is strongly advised. Never turn your back to the ocean.

An Underground World

A sandy stretch of beach that seems devoid of life may conceal an underground world of marine organisms. Worms, crabs and tiny invertebrates dwell in the first six to eight inches beneath the surface. *Some of these organisms are so small they can live in the tiny spaces between the grains of sand.* When seawater washes over the quartz sand, it percolates into the sand, carrying with it plankton and the dissolved oxygen that nourishes these beach creatures.

A Balance of Erosion and Sand Deposit

The beach changes radically with the seasons. Severe winter storms generate large waves that sweep sand from the shoreline and into the ocean, where it remains as sandbars in the water just offshore. When spring arrives, gentler waves deposit this sand back on the beach. The late spring winds blow the sand farther inland where it is caught by plants in the first set of dunes called foredunes.

Plants, such as yellow sand verbena, beach sagewort and beach bur, hold the blowing sand, thereby adding to the height of the dunes. With a large supply of sand held in the foredunes, a balance between beach erosion and deposition can be maintained over time.



Yellow Sand Verbena



Beach Sagewort



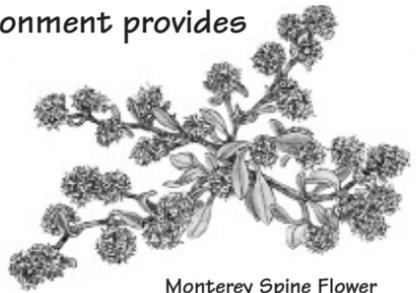
Beach Bur



Coastal Bluff Restoration A Work-in-progress

Re-establishing native vegetation washed away by high winter surf is critical for protecting the sandy soil from wind erosion and human impacts. Park staff efforts in trail maintenance and planting are ongoing.

Hardy native plants survive on the coastal bluff by overcoming the sand whipping across and piling up around it, salt spray coating their leaves and stems, and the sun drying out needed moisture. The coastal environment provides habitat for plants and animals, including Tidestom's lupine, Monterey spine flower, and black legless lizard.



Monterey Spine Flower

Plant illustration by Mary Pomeroy

Shell Middens

Rumsien Indians used the coastal areas of Monterey Bay for camping and hunting sites prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Monterey Bay area in the 1700s. They fished, gathered shellfish, and hunted marine and land mammals. Remnants of these old camp sites "middens" can be seen in the bluff face. The dark soil with bits of broken shell and rocks from their middens provide archaeologists with information about their diet and technology and how these changed through time.

Rock of Ages

Santa Lucia granodiorite, the rock forming this coastal shoreline, is more than 100 million years old.

Formed from a molten mass deep in the earth, this dense, hard rock is comprised of large rectangular crystals of orthoclase feldspar, gray translucent quartz, creamy plagioclase feldspar and black biotite mica. It was exposed through massive uplifts and transported here by the action of plate tectonics. This movement most likely caused the fissures you see in the rocks. These cracks weaken the integrity of the rock, making it more vulnerable to erosion.



Seals and Sea Lions

Sea lions and seals, a group of marine mammals collectively known as pinnipeds (feathered feet), make their homes in these coastal waters. The most frequently observed pinnipeds seen resting on the rocks or feeding in the near-shore waters are California sea lions and harbor seals.



Sea Lion

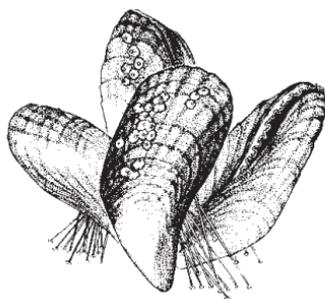


Harbor Seal

Protected Marine Tide Pools

Approximately every 12 hours the tide advances and retreats over the rocky fringe of the coast, covering, then uncovering, a group of plants and animals that have adapted to the intertidal zone. Survival in this narrow strand is accomplished by those marine species that can find and hold their places amid the rocks. They must be able to survive crashing waves, submersion during high tides, and exposure to drying wind and sun during low tides.

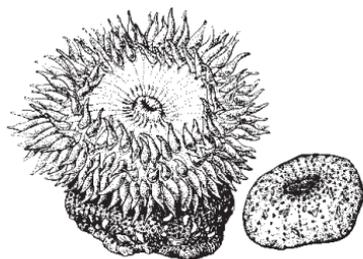
California mussels grow in large clumps amid the rocks. Like other mussels, this mollusk holds itself up on end by means of tough *byssus* threads that anchor it against the force of the crashing surf.



Hermit crabs live in discarded shells, most often snail shells. The shell protects its soft body. When the hermit crab grows too big for its shell, it finds a larger one. Its role in the food web is that of garbage collector, cleaning up plant and animal debris.



Aggregating anemones cover their soft soggy bodies with bits of shells and pebbles for disguise and to protect themselves from the sun. When covered with water, they use a crown of stinging tentacles to stun and engulf their prey.



Illustrations © Monterey Bay Aquarium

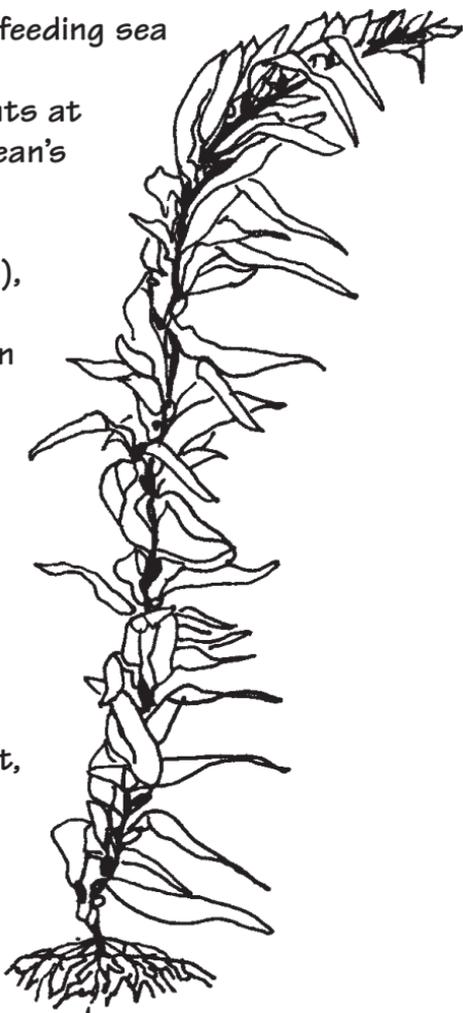
When exploring the tidepools, please do not disturb or remove any rocks, plants or animals. This is a protected marine reserve.

Giant Kelp: From Underwater Forests to Common Food Additives

The mat of brown kelp floating on the water's surface just offshore attracts feeding sea otters, circling gulls and diving cormorants. All this activity hints at the riches that lie below the ocean's surface in the kelp forest.

Giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyifera*), is the dominate algae in this area. It grips rocks on the ocean bottom with "holdfasts," and uses air filled bulbs found at the base of each blade to float the long fronds to the surface. This floating ability enables the algae, that can reach 100 feet tall, rise towards sunlight so photosynthesis can take place.

Along most of California's coast, special barges harvest the top several feet of kelp, which can grow as much as a foot each day during summer. Giant kelp contains algin, a chemical commonly used in many products. The extracted algin is an effective emulsifying and suspension agent used in salad dressing, ice cream, fruit drinks, water-based paints, adhesives, food wrappers, toothpaste, surgical jellies and hand lotion.



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