

Point Reyes

National Seashore
California

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

A Land in Motion

The story of Point Reyes is a study in motion—slow continental transformations and sudden, violent jolts that shake the earth; the rhythmic play of sea-spray along the coast; wings of birds flashing in flight; drifting shrouds of mist and fog; grazing deer who occasionally follow your movements with soft eyes; migrating whales off the shore; and the ebb and flow of Pacific tides.

The Point Reyes Peninsula is an unusual, dislocated land which long baffled geologists. Why should the rocks of this craggy coast match those of the Tehachapi Mountains, more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) to the south? The answer lies in continental drift: the constant motion of the Earth's crust. The peninsula rides high on the eastern edge of the Pacific plate. This, one of the six great plates forming most of the Earth's crust, creeps steadily northwestward about ten centimeters (three inches) a year. The

rest of North America, except Alaska, is borne westward on the slower-moving American plate. In Olema Valley, near park headquarters, these two great land masses grind together. Where one plate ends and another begins cannot be pinpointed accurately, for a single fault line does not exist. This meeting of the plates is, quite simply, a rift zone, which contains many large and small faults running parallel and at odd angles to one another. Because each plate cannot move freely, tremendous pressures build up along this junction. The jumbled nature of the surface landscape is the manifestation of stress far below the surface of the Earth, often as much as 300 or 400 kilometers deep. From time to time this pressure becomes too great and the underlying rock breaks loose with dramatic and sometimes catastrophic results and the land surface itself actually moves. This is what happened in the Olema Valley in 1906; the result was the dev-

astating San Francisco Earthquake. At that time, the Point Reyes Peninsula was thrust five meters (16.4 feet) northwestward.

The varied surface patterns of Point Reyes are more obvious than the normally slow changes underground. A belt of topographic changes follows the San Andreas Fault. You can see streams and estuaries cutting through the landscape of folded hills and valleys. Awaiting you are many kilometers of beaches within sight of Douglas-fir and bishop pine forests. Here, you may watch deer browsing near rocks where sea lions bask in the sun; and you may count many of the 361 species of birds that have been seen here over the years.

As if to accent the separation along the San Andreas Fault, the weather may vary quite markedly from one side to the other.

A succession of summer days east of Inverness Ridge may be warm and sunny, while on the ocean side, a chilling fog may hide the sun. The clearing of fog often signals the onset of strong winds. So, if you're planning to explore the park on foot, prepare yourself for cool weather, dampness, and wind. Remember that weather varies, not only from day to day, but *from hour to hour*.

From February through July, mild weather carpets the land with flowers. Summer is the time for a pleasant hike along the peaceful trails of Inverness Ridge. Autumn weather and beach activities seem to be perfectly matched. The thrill of watching gray whales migrating southward to Baja California and back to the Bering Sea is compensation for the wet Point Reyes' winter. But even if you don't see a whale, the bays and esteros will be thronged with seals and migratory shore birds.

Man at Point Reyes

For centuries before Europeans arrived, the Coast Miwok Indians inhabited these shores. Their lives were shaped by a pattern of changing seasons and the uneven temper of the weather along the coast. As peaceful hunters and gatherers, they moved about in this plentiful land to harvest acorns and berries, to catch salmon and shellfish, and to hunt deer and elk.

In the summer of 1579, these friendly Indians greeted Francis Drake, an English adventurer in the service of Queen Elizabeth I of England, as he beached his ship, the *Golden Hinde*, on the California coast to make repairs. In the absence of any known contrary evidence, Drake most probably careened his ship in Drake's Estero.

Drake and his men stayed for about five weeks that summer. The Miwoks supplemented the Englishmen's rations with boiled fish and meal ground from wild roots and celebrated these strangers' arrival with wailing, orations, and offerings. Wandering inland, they sighted herds of deer and one of the crew noted a landscape "farre different from the shoare, a goodly country, and fruitfull soyle, stored with many blessings fit for the use of man." Before

the *Golden Hinde* sailed westward across the Pacific toward England, Drake named this land Nova Albion, meaning New England. He doubtless noted, in the pale cliffs that rise sheer above the beach, a resemblance to the Dover coast on his own English Channel. Through the crude sign language with which he and the natives had learned to communicate, Drake concluded that they wished to surrender their allegiance to his sovereign. So, when Drake sailed away, he left behind him "a plate of brasse, fast nailed to a great and firme post," proclaiming Queen Elizabeth's reign over this land and its people.

Explorers from the outside world came and went. In 1595, Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeno's *San Agustin* was wrecked in a storm that drove the ship upon the coast; several crewmen were lost. Stranded on the beach, Cermeno and the other survivors finished the construction of a small launch to carry them to Mexico. Originally it was planned to use the launch to survey the coast. Since that time, porcelain pieces, believed to have come from the ship's cargo of Ming china, have turned up in excavations of various Miwok Indian dwelling sites. It was a Spanish explorer, Don Sebastian Vizcaino, who gave Point Reyes its name on

January 6, 1603. Vizcaino, sailing north out of Monterey to explore the California coast, was buffeted by fierce winds during a one-day stormy anchorage in Drakes Bay. Turning back to sea, Vizcaino drove past the rocky headlands which he named La Punta de Los Reyes, for this, the 12th day of Christmas, was the Feast of the Three Kings.

The English never returned to press their claim on Nova Albion, but left it for the Spaniards to colonize. Almost 200 years passed after Drake's visit, however, before settlers began to arrive. Indeed, San Francisco Bay, one of the world's great natural harbors, was not discovered by Europeans until 1769 when an overland expedition of Spanish explorers reached it. Mariners had repeatedly overlooked the narrow entrance to the bay in the seemingly smooth coastline south of the Point Reyes promontory. Even today from as close in as five kilometers (three miles), the Golden Gate is virtually undetectable with the hills of the East Bay and the headlands seemingly a continuous landmass.

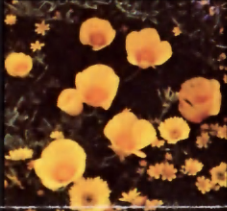
Ships of many nations seeking trade in raw materials and furs began visiting the California coast in the early 19th century.

Under increasing contact with the outside world and new ideas, the settlers of California and Mexico revolted against the Spanish government and in 1821 established an independent Republic of Mexico. During the years of Spanish rule, the Miwok Indians of Point Reyes had been taken from their homelands to labor in the Spanish missions. Except for a few Miwoks who had managed to evade the missionaries and some survivors of the missions who wandered back after the Mexican revolution, Point Reyes had seen the last of its original inhabitants.

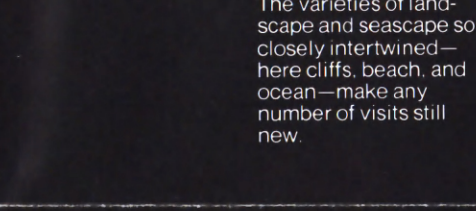
During Mexican rule, three "Lords of Point Reyes"—James Berry, Rafael Garcia, and Antonio Osio—held the entire peninsula through land grants, but not for long. The United States' conquest of California raised the curtain on the land speculators waiting in the wings. The eventual result was the breakup of the great domains into a number of cattle ranches. Beef and dairy cattle have roamed the brushy flatlands of Point Reyes ever since. Herds still graze in its pastoral zone, just as Congress intended when it passed legislation authorizing a National Seashore on September 13, 1962.



Fog rolls in over the hills and begins to filter fingers down the slopes.



The Point Reyes Light sits precariously on the cliff above the booming surf, while a short distance away yellow California poppies bloom amidst some daisies.



The varieties of landscape and seascape so closely intertwined—here cliffs, beach, and ocean—make any number of visits still new.



A starfish clings tenaciously to a wave-splashed rock.



Visitor Information

When You Arrive

Stop at the Bear Valley Visitor Center at the Bear Valley entrance to the park, the Kenneth C. Patrick Visitor Center on Drakes Bay, and the Point Reyes Light Visitor Center for further details on the story of Point Reyes. Always check at a visitor center for information on local weather, safety, and tide conditions. These centers will have directions to campgrounds outside the park, motels, eating places, riding stables, and bicycle shops.

Check on park programs and exhibits here, too. Each visitor center has a good selection of books and maps to help you to a more thorough understanding of the area.

Administration

Point Reyes National Seashore, containing 65,303 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Point Reyes, CA 94956, is in charge.

Camping

Car camping is not permitted in the park. There are, however, four hike-in campgrounds: Sky, Glen, Coast, and Wildcat. The latter is reserved for group use. Camping is restricted to these campgrounds. Permits are required and are available without charge at Bear Valley Visitor Center. Camping is limited to one night in each campground, or a total of three nights. Groups may spend two nights at Wildcat.

Sky Camp

On the western side of Mt. Wittenberg at an elevation of 1,024 feet. It is 2.5 miles from Bear Valley trailhead. It commands a view of Drakes Bay and surrounding hills. 12 sites.

Coast Camp

On an open grassy bluff about 656 feet above the beach. There are no trees. It's about 8.9 miles from Bear Valley trailhead. 14 sites.

Wildcat Camp

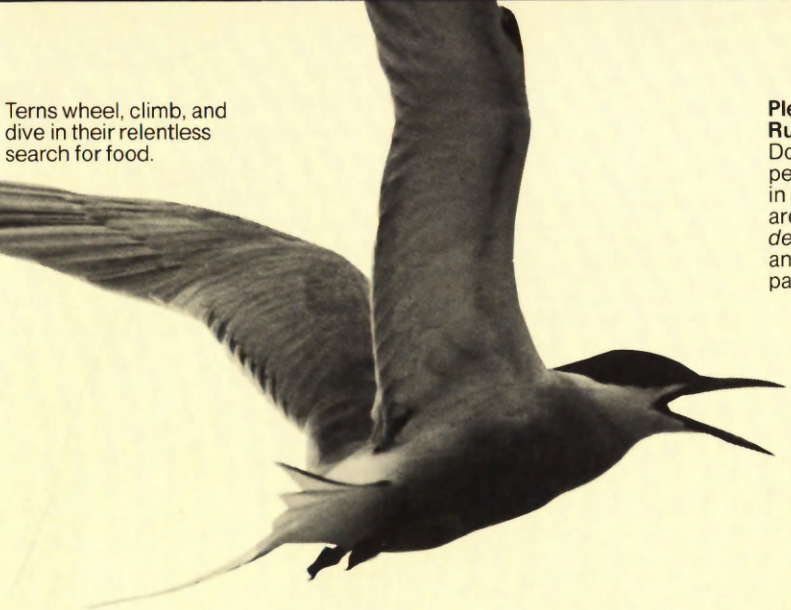
This group camp lies in a grassy meadow near a small stream flowing into the sea. About 6.3 miles from Bear Valley trailhead. Easy access to Wildcat Beach. 12 sites.

Glen Camp

In a small, wooded valley about five miles from Bear Valley trailhead. Reached by nearly-level trails. 12 sites.

Each campsite will accommodate a maximum of eight persons (12 in Wildcat). All of the campgrounds have restrooms, drinking water, and a hitch rail for horses. Each campsite has a table, charcoal grill, and tent space.

Terns wheel, climb, and dive in their relentless search for food.



Please Observe These Rules

Dogs and pets are not permitted on trails or in campgrounds. They are permitted on designated beaches and elsewhere in the park if on a leash.

Wood fires are prohibited in campgrounds. Use only charcoal, gas stoves, or canned heat. Driftwood fires are permitted only on sandy beaches.

A camping permit must be obtained.

No fireworks, firearms, or weapons of any kind.

Campsites must be left clean.

Quiet hours are from sunset to sunrise.

Bicycles are prohibited within wilderness areas.

Do not shortcut trails.

For Your Safety Sleeping on beaches is not only prohibited, but dangerous; tides come up to the cliffs.

Do not climb cliffs. They crumble easily; your foothold may disappear and leave you in thin air.

Hang your food on poles provided. Raccoons and foxes are numerous and aggressive.

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To See and Do

The best place to begin your visit is **Bear Valley**. From California Highway 1 at Olema, a one-minute drive brings you to park headquarters. As you turn onto the entrance road, you'll cross the San Andreas Fault and enter an "Island in Time." There you will find an extensive display of exhibits, specimens, and artifacts. The display interprets a wide range of the natural and historic highlights of the park from

earthquake geology to gray whales. Other points of interest here are: (1) the Earthquake Trail, a 0.7-mile walk along the San Andreas Fault, (2) the 0.7-mile self-guiding Woodpecker Nature Trail, (3) the Morgan Horse Ranch, and (4) Kule Loklo—a replica of a Coast Miwok Indian Village.

Down to the Sea
The impact of Point Reyes is most dramatic at the meeting of land and sea. Many such areas can be reached by car, so begin by leaving the headquarters area (All distance figures will be from this point.) and turning left onto Bear Valley Road. Then 1.3 miles further on turn left onto Limantour Road. This drive will take you to Limantour Beach where you can swim, beachcomb, or picnic.

Nearby Limantour Estero is a favorite of birdwatchers for its variety and number of birds.

Return to Bear Valley Road which shortly joins Sir Francis Drake Highway and continues to the top of Point Reyes Peninsula.

Passing through the town of Inverness, you come to a road (7.5 miles from headquarters) that leads to Tomales Bay State Park, Abbotts Lagoon, and McClures Beach: a good area to explore tidepools. If you leave this side trip for another day, continue along Drake Highway. At 8.7 miles take the

road to the Mount Vision Overlook for a panoramic view of Limantour and Drakes Esteros and of the curve of Drakes and Point Reyes Beaches to their meeting with the hammerhead southern tip of the peninsula.

Back on Drake Highway head west and south to Point Reyes Beach, a windswept stretch of sand that is divided into two areas: North Beach at 13.2 miles and South Beach at 15.7 miles.

Beachcombing is good along these beaches. It's hard to tell what your searches may turn up. **Don't go near the water! The hammering surf and rip currents are extremely hazardous.**

A good protected beach for swimming and wading, or just lying in the sun (if it is out) is at Drakes Beach. The turnout is at 15.7 miles between North and South Beaches.

On Drake Highway

continue south to the Point Reyes Lighthouse, at 20.5 miles. It's a five- to ten-minute walk from the parking area. Even if you don't elect to descend the 300 steps to the lighthouse, the view is impressive. This point of land is one of the most notorious hazards to navigation on the Pacific coast; the surrounding water is a graveyard of ships. The rocky shelves below are home for thousands of California murrelets. Sea lions

bask on the offshore rocks, and the overlook is a favored viewing area for the California gray whales' winter migration.

These are only a few of the interesting points in the park accessible by car and short walks. There are many others which we hope you'll have the thrill of discovering for yourself. They are there to see, to touch, to photograph, to enjoy. But to become fully acquainted with the park, leave the

roads and spend a day of exploration on foot. You will no longer be an onlooker, but a part of the scene that is Point Reyes National Seashore.

Hiking the Trails
Three types of terrain distinguish the trail systems of Point Reyes—the pasture lands of Pierce Point and the Estero Trail; the chaparral ridges and California-laurel valleys to the east and west of Limantour Road; and the forests and meadowlands in

the southeast end of the park.

Precautions
When hiking, bring a supply of water. **Stream water is not fit to drink.** Backpackers especially should be prepared for fog, cold, and wind in July as well as in December. The waters at lakes and bay beaches are inviting after a warm hike; **enter unknown waters with caution.** Slopes and valley bottoms are usually covered with tall, dense brush, much of

it **poison oak and stinging nettles.** Staying on trails will help you avoid getting lost, injured, or itchy. And it will keep you away from the edges of the steep cliffs that are likely to crumble and slide, if you get too close.

The chevrons on the trails shown on the map indicate steep trails. They point uphill.

The principal trailheads are Bear Valley, Palomarin, Five Brooks, and Estero. All have

adequate parking. You may get excellent trail maps at any visitor center. Here are some trail distances from Bear Valley trailhead:

	miles
Arch Rock	4.1
Coast Camp	8.9
Divide Meadow	1.6
Double Point	8.6
Glen Camp	4.6
Palomarin	11.8
Sky Camp	2.7
Wildcat Camp	6.3

PLEASE—Some residents and ranchers have retained rights of use and occupancy. Respect their rights of property and privacy.



Tule elk roam the quiet landscape of Tomales Point.



A stream spills down a cliff and onto the beach—an unusual setting for a waterfall.



Down rather than up is the way to this lighthouse.



Looking this way and that, the murrelets have all directions covered.

