

LEISURE / TRAVEL / BUDGET TRAVEL

A coastal treasure: Point Arena-Stornetta National Monument

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Stornetta part of California Coastal National Monument

Photo courtesy of Bob Wick of Bureau of Land Management used with permission

An adventurous three-hour-plus sojourn begins north on the dramatic coastline of Highway 1 from San Francisco, as you intrepidly snake your way up and down hairpin turns. You will encounter enormous waves crashing against cavernous cliffs and islands of sculptured rock formations, with windswept cypress trees on the left. Long stretches of manicured farmland and Victorian homes from early 1800s on your right will transplant you back in time.

It is not until you arrive just north of the town of Point Arena at **Stornetta Public Lands** that you will connect with Mother Earth and the marvel of California's coastline. Recently declared on March 11, 2014 by President Obama as the first land-based California Coastal National

Monument, Stornetta is a hiker's haven and photographer's dream.

This massive ecological conservatory of a magnificent 12-mile stretch of ocean adorns some 1,660-plus acres for hikers now to explore from Point Arena to Manchester State Beach. **Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands** are only part of the enormous California Coastal Monument which covers 1,100 miles of stunning scenery comprising some 20,000 rocks and small islands. Stornetta Public Lands consist of undeveloped federal and state-managed public lands, coastal bluffs, sandy beaches, and dramatic dunes, as well as the Garcia River estuary—home to the prime Coho and Chinook salmon habitat. The Lands' complex and fragile ecosystem is also the home to great blue herons, laysan albatross, peregrine falcons, and black oystercatchers.

Once a dairy ranch, this massive piece of land was donated by Larry Stornetta, a partner in the ranch who provided this historic acreage of windswept bluffs and dunes. The Stornetta family continues to graze cattle and raise beans and peas here. Don't be surprised if you see a cow or two cross the path.

This is one of only four other areas in the world that has deep upwellings, an oceanographic phenomenon that involves wind-driven motion of dense, cooler, and nutrient-rich water towards the ocean surface.

Margaret Lindgren, owner of Unbeaten Path Hiking Tours, offering personal and group nature tours, can take you for a private walk through this treasure trove of birded bluffs, sea lions, elephant seals, pelicans, and Spanish moss (Old Man's Beard) mystically covering the branches of cypresses—all easily accessible from the historic Arena Lighthouse and Highway 1.

Living within this diverse environment is a number of threatened and endangered species—from the Point Arena mountain beaver and California red-legged frog to the western snowy plover, and Behren's silverspot butterfly.

According to Lindgren, “Many species feed, breed and nest along the coast and some come from long distances to do so. It's important not to disturb them - respect wildlife and protect yourself by not climbing down onto rocks, into sinkholes or into other areas off trail.”

In addition, the new signage on trails will serve to educate the public about the importance of sustaining these species and their habitats, and to the continuing preservation of this special area.

Visitors can enjoy several hours of daytime activities including wildlife viewing, hiking, bird watching, fishing, picnicking, nature photography and public access to the Mendocino coast.

You will not stop clicking your camera during the two-hour hike with Lindgren. Wear sturdy hiking shoes for further comfort, so that you can concentrate on the spectacular views ahead.

In a 2014 New York Times article, Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands were rated the third best place to go in the world--and this unprecedented natural treasure is just hours away from San Francisco.

Unbeaten Path Tours

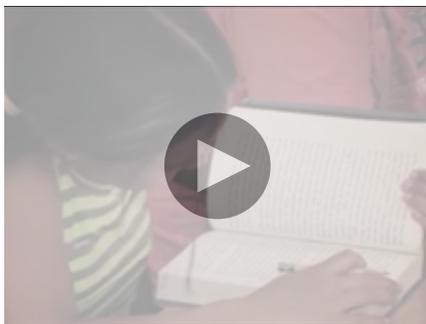
Two-hour Photographers Tours and Seascape Tours are available (emphasis on coastline for dramatic views). Cost is \$55 per person for two hours, \$75 per person for an extended three-hour tour. Contact: 707-888-6121

Parking is permitted along Lighthouse (County) Road and at Point Arena City Hall.

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