

Meandering Through Mendocino Coast

By [Beverly Mann](#) | September 30, 2014 | Last Updated: October 2, 2014 10:02 pm



It is not every day that I get to have a casual lunch with a mayor, dressed in jeans and with his dog. Or go on a safari to be up close and personal with some rare, endangered species—and all only a few hours from home. But then again, I haven't been to Mendocino County for more than 25 years. Upon arriving there, many an unexpected, pleasurable experience and journey awaited me.

My adventurous three-hour sojourn began north on the dramatic coastline of Highway 1 from San Francisco, as I intrepidly snaked my way up and down hairpin turns. I encountered enormous waves crashing against cavernous cliffs and islands of sculptured rock formations, with windswept cypress trees on my left.

Long stretches of manicured farmland and Victorian homes from the early 1800s on my right transported me back in time. I had already left the fast-paced city life behind and was totally indulged in the vast magnificence of the nature enveloping me.

Stornetta National Monument

My five-day trek through tiny coastal towns included more than scenic beauty and peace of mind. I absorbed a wealth of history and strong sense of community through the eyes of the colourful locals. I leisurely strolled through such welcoming places as Point Arena, which was placed on the map in March 11, 2014, when President Obama declared Stornetta the first land-based California Coastal National Monument.

This massive ecological conservatory of a magnificent 12-mile stretch of ocean adorns some 1,300 acres for hikers to now explore. 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, an agency offering personal and group nature tours, took me 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 recently renovated Arena Lighthouse and Highway 1.

Meeting the Locals

Afterward, I explored the central town of Point Arena where I met a handful of friendly residents, including charismatic Rufus, who pointed me toward the 1928 art deco movie and film house that was featuring a local children's performance upon my arrival that day.

Directly across the street sits Franny's Cup & Saucer, owned by Barbara Burkey (who had a tearoom in Paris and worked as pastry chef for Chez Panisse in Berkeley) and her daughter Franny. The enticing aroma lured me into a cornucopia of creative baked delicacies. I succumbed to a heavenly slice of fresh Gravenstein apple pie.

In this jewel of a town, it appears that everyone is only six degrees of separation from each other and wears numerous hats. Coincidentally, while chatting with an influential local, Barbara Pratt, down at Cove's Coffee, a popular hangout, I met the congenial town mayor Doug Burkey, former owner of Franny's, who also tutors special education students.

While enjoying his coffee and sandwich alongside his shaggy dog Webber, Burkey candidly expressed his feelings on the recent publicity of Stornetta and its impact on the town.

"Even though there has been an influx of tourists from outside California and the country since the announcement, I'm concerned that Point Arena may become a tourist town from a working town. I don't want this place to lose its authenticity," he said.

Safari

Part of the allure of this unique part of Mendocino County, besides the locals and landscape, is the nearby 110-acre outpost, B. Bryan Preserve, where one can go on a one-and-a-half-hour safari.

I journeyed in a jeep with owner Judy Mello and a handful of others to help feed the rare Rothschild giraffes (only 700 left in the world). I closely viewed the largest herd of Roan antelopes outside of Africa and three different kinds of zebras. There are also two cottages and a carriage house for a unique overnight stay.

According to Mello who spoke in her charming southern accent, "It takes \$60,000 for us to feed the animals. My husband Frank and I came out from Mississippi with only 11 animals in 2005, and now we have 80."

Little River

Just a short way up the coast sits another treasure of a town, Little River, once known for logging and shipping, and a more than 1,800-acre Van Damme State Park.

The area is also known for 1970s flick, "Same Time Next Year," a romantic comedy which was filmed (and is played non-stop in every room) at the historic Heritage House Resort, newly renovated with 45 luxury rooms (soon to be 70 once renovation is completed). An added plus—all the rooms and the dining facility offer spectacular ocean views.

The resort's 5200 Restaurant and Lounge serves a tasty breakfast, lunch, and dinner—from farm to table. I savoured a fresh salmon on a bed of couscous accented by a sweet onion and bacon stew. My appetizer was a huge bowl of baby mussels with crunchy garlic bread. The hot oven olive rolls were also a winner.

For yet another memorable meal, the neighbouring Little River Inn celebrates its 75th birthday with a first-class restaurant menu by the creative hand of executive chef Marc Dym, whose originality extends beyond cuisine. He helped develop a limited-edition private label beer made with cap mushrooms and savoury spices for the occasion.

The spinach salad was presented as an intricate flower petal, a work of art. The pine-crust fresh salmon with grilled polenta left a memorable mark, as well as the finishing touch of a mouthwatering banana bread pudding with whipped cream, enough for two—or more.

Further Along the Coastline

Heading just five minutes further north sits the touristy and artsy Mendocino. I spent hours here exploring the colourful boutiques and such California Registered Historic Landmarks as the Taoist Temple of Kwan Tai, surviving four generations of Hee family, and the statuesque 1882 Victorian MacCallum House Inn and Restaurant, which serves seasonal organic cuisine while providing a comfortable place welcoming both children and pets.

From Mendocino I continued north for an approximately 15-minute drive to Ft. Bragg, Mendocino County's largest coastal community rich in diversified activities. One of the highlights was my hike along Glass Beach, which surprisingly was once a city dump in the 1950s. Now decades later, endless areas of sand are completely blanketed with tiny bits of coloured, broken glass polished by decades of ocean waves.

A visit to the nearby Glass Museum is highly suggested to see the world's largest permanent glass exhibit and an assortment of glistening glass jewellery salvaged from the beach.

Across the road and in full view stands Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, where I wandered through a rainbow of rhododendrons, dahlias, and lush foliage. I was indulged for two hours exploring the narrow paths leading to the ocean, where the indigenous Pomo tribes lived and survived off the rich source of roots, berries, and fish of this land.

I dined in the centre of town at the long-standing Mendo Bistro, devouring a mouth-watering hanger steak that melted in my mouth, along with a refreshing summer salad. Reservations are recommended because of its popularity with locals and tourists for hearty meals offered at a reasonable price.

I couldn't imagine a better way to conclude the trip than with a peaceful, scenic sunset kayak paddle along the Noyo River with Jeff and Cate, owners of Liquid Fusion Kayaking, who are experts in spotting elusive birds, river otters, and other rare species.

During my drive back to San Francisco, I promised myself that I would not let 20-some years pass again before returning to Mendocino Coast. Hopefully I'll be back the "same time next year"—if not sooner.

For further information, go to: www.visitmendocino.com

Beverly Mann has been a feature, arts, and travel writer in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 28 years. To read more of her articles, visit: www.beverlymann.com

Article printed from The Epoch Times: <http://www.theepochtimes.com>

URL to article: <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/990863-meandering-through-mendocino-coast/>

Click [here](#) to print.

Copyright © 2016 The Epoch Times. All rights reserved.