

# CONTRA COSTA HILLS CLUB'S OUTING TO THE MENDOCINO & FORT BRAGG AREA

SEPTEMBER 15-18, 2025

On this outing 28 CCHC members explored the towns and outskirts of Fort Bragg and Mendocino with some of the most unique Northern California coastal ecology, sweeping views, beaches, verdant forests of pines, firs, and redwoods next to pygmy forests. And all experienced within the same day!!

Hikers were provided with a variety of hiking options to accommodate their abilities.

Hike leaders were Wanda Fong, Helen Wong-Johe, Ed Osada, Steve Chun and Angie Toy.

Many thanks to the CCHC Outings Committee members who did an outstanding job in the meticulous planning of this trip.

*Thank you to Noël Siver for proofreading, and those who contributed write-ups (Pam, Georgia, Marian, and Steve Z.) and photos (Sylvia, Liz, and Noël).*

**Monday, September 15, 2025, Day 1**

## **Elm Street Trailhead Loop / MacKerricher State Park**

On the first day of hiking on our Mendocino Outing, twenty-eight hikers arrived in their pre-designated carpools eager to hike the nearby bluffs of Fort Bragg. The approximately 1.5-mile Ka Kahleh Trail included beautiful views of the craggy CA coastline and access to the famous Glass Beach. The weather was very cooperative to our outing with a sunny 68 degrees and NO FOG! We crossed the historical Pudding Creek Trestle, which is reminiscent of the train tracks of Fort Bragg's early days and were able to check out the many "locks of love" that adorned its cable wires.



Locks of Love on Pudding Creek Trestle



Plank Trail

The second half of our day's adventures had us drive to MacKerricher SP. Here we had lunch and then walked the well-maintained plank trail and stairs to the tide pools. I was particularly glad that we have some well-informed tide pool enthusiasts in our group to help us identify what to look for. One area that caught our attention were the many hermit crabs that

had taken over the vacated snail shells, scurrying about as the waves withdrew. What a fun sighting!

From here, the entire group would split to venture on to either of two options: 1. the Botanical Gardens, or 2. continue to hike the bluffs back to the hotel (with ice cream store optional side trip).

Grateful outing participant,

- Pam Littlejohn

### **Ka Kahleh coastal trail from near Glass Beach to our motels in Fort Bragg**

After lunch our merry band split into two - those who wanted to explore the area independently and those who wanted a hike along the bluff in Fort Bragg. Nineteen people opted to join leaders Steven Chun and Wanda Fong to walk on this warm and sunny day.

Starting near Glass Beach, we headed south on the Ka Kahleh (meaning “white water” in the indigenous Pomo language) Trail. The trail is a fully ADA compliant all-access surface on 93 acres of land formerly owned by the Georgia Pacific Lumber Company. Access to the public was not available for over a century. The trail was completed in 2016 and meanders along the rugged bluff overlooking the Pacific.



Man and his dog riding along  
ADA-compliant pathway

Our first stop was the Dynamite Shack where we learned that the Union Lumber Company used dynamite to blast a railway tunnel through the ridge dividing the Pudding Creek and Noyo River watersheds in 1892 and that the unfortunate men who worked with the dynamite often suffered neurological damage, earning the name “powder monkeys.”

About half-way through our walk, there was a FORK (or perhaps a spoon) in the road. Those who were ready to put their feet up, opted to stay on the coastal route. Those with a fondness for ice cream, hiked off trail into Fort Bragg where the famous Cowlick's Ice Cream has been in business since 2001. Known for its handcrafted ice cream using locally sourced ingredients, it offers unusual flavors such as candy cap mushroom ice cream (delicious!).



Noyo Bay

Re-energized by sugar, our group, now numbering ten, headed back to the trail and visited the Crow's Nest Interpretive Center, managed by the Noyo Center for Marine Science. In the small but impressive space, there were exhibits on marine mammals including a [small] portion of the skeleton of a 73' Blue Whale. We also learned the sad story of how the purple sea urchin has been decimating the kelp forests on our western coastline. It seemed there would be no end to their ravaging because their natural predator, the sun starfish, was itself dying out from a bacterial infection thus allowing the purple urchins complete freedom to devour the kelp forests. Thanks to marine conservationists, the sun starfish has been bred in captivity and is being returned to the oceans and again we are seeing a balance in nature and a return of the lush kelp beds in the Pacific.

Before the end of the trail, we encountered a small monument to the people of Otsuchi and Fort Bragg, "united across the Pacific in hopes and dreams." Otsuchi, Fort Bragg's sister city, is on the northeastern coast of Japan, where the 2011 tsunami caused untold damage. It was heartwarming to see that individual people and cities can grasp hands, help one another. and offer hope.

- Georgia Chun

**Tuesday, September 16, 2025, Day 2**

**Fern Canyon and Pygmy Forest**

Our leaders Ed Osada, Steve Chun, Angie Toy, Wanda Fong, and Helen Johe led 15 overachievers on a 9-10 mile hike with a 1000-foot vertical in Van Damme State Park in Little



Fern Canyon

River near Mendocino. The lollipop trail took Fern Canyon Trail, named after author Jules Fern (known for his epic, “20,000 leaves under the trees”) then through the circular, lollipop portion which was the Pygmy Forest trail. The Pygmy Forest trail is all on a raised wooden boardwalk.

Though a vertical of 1000 feet, the trail did not seem so steep as it was a gradual slow climb across well-worn paths often crossed by tree roots from the many redwoods which supplied shade and dappled sunlight keeping the weather very temperate. The Fern Trail lived up to its name with the valleys covered with beautiful ferns of many varieties. Special

acknowledgement goes to Roberta O’Grady and Jo Anne Schultz, our twin 89-year-olds who hammered along at a steady pace and by example offered us inspiration and hope for us all to have many more years of hiking through the redwoods and other paths of Northern California.

- Marian Zalewski
- Steve Zalewski

**Wednesday, September 17, 2025, Day 3**

### **Russian Gulch Fern Canyon and Waterfall Loop**



Our group this morning was led by Angie Toy and Steve Chun. We headed out to hike through the Russian Gulch Fern Canyon and continue on the Waterfall Loop. Our walk began with the calls of a loud rooster nearby but were soon replaced with the quiet sounds of the forest in the cool morning. The trail was shaded by the tall redwood canopy and we were surrounded by abundant ferns. The environment seemed ideal for the banana slugs we passed by and a variety of mushrooms and lichen. We reached the falls loop trail which took us upwards and eventually to the turnoff to visit the waterfall. The short trail up to the waterfall brought us to two small waterfalls that fell into the same small pool. The trail bridge passed over the stream near the base of the falls and then climbed up to the top of the falls for a great view.

We returned to the cars (and rooster) along the same quiet trail. Overall, this was an easy to moderate hike of about 6.2 miles with a 774-foot elevation gain.

- Marian Zalewski

## Mendocino Headlands

A final option for exploration on the last day of our glorious adventure in the Mendocino area was a walk along the headlands hugging half the perimeter of the town of Mendocino. Many people opted to explore the town itself but eight of us, led by Steven Chun, headed out to the trail that winds along the cliffs 70 feet above the ocean. The entire trail covers 4.8 miles but we probably covered a mile and a half.



Wave breaking inside a sea cave  
Mendocino Headlands

Long before becoming a state park in 1974, the land was occupied by the Pomo, Cahto and Yuki peoples. In the 19th and 20th centuries logging and fishing industries thrived in Mendocino. Now the town preserves the Victorian architecture and the feeling of a small town and close community. Thankfully, the headlands were saved from development and kept as a state park with access for the public.

The trails are narrow paths through the dry grasses venturing sometimes close to the cliff edge and other times wandering back to the town. By this middle of September, wildflowers were rare but we saw abundant wild cabbage.

As one would expect in a coastal town, we found evidence of shipping on the bluffs. Gigantic links of chain still remaining on the bluffs have various stories associated with their purpose. They may have been used to anchor large ships in the Gold Rush era and they could have been used in the transfer of logs to ships in the water below.

Also intriguing were the wave-erosion-formed arches in the rocks just beyond the cliffs. The geology of the area, explained to us by Steven, is complicated, but fascinating. The headlands are comprised of a mélange of resistant rock (chert, basalt, and greenstone) and sedimentary rocks (sandstone and shale) set in a geologically active area. All are ingredients for earthquakes, uplift, and erosion.



Steps down to the beach  
Mendocino Headlands

Returning to the town of Mendocino, alerted by Noël, we visited a Masonic building to see a sculpture on a rooftop cupola. Carved from a single gigantic redwood log are Father Time, a weeping maiden, an urn, a book and a broken pillar – all symbolic to Masons and a reminder to all that “time, patience and perseverance will accomplish all things”! The sculpture was completed in 1869 and the lodge in 1873. Both are still standing and appear to be in good shape.

The setting of the headlands is ideal for peaceful contemplation, beachcombing, and pondering the mysterious ways of nature.

- Georgia Chun



Time and the Maiden  
Masonic Hall  
Mendocino

### Point Cabrillo Light Station



Lighthouse in the fog



Lighthouse after the fog lifted

Group dinner that evening was at Mayan Fusion Restaurant in Fort Bragg