

Contra Costa Hills Club Outing
Santa Cruz
April 19-23, 2026

Embracing Nature's Wet Wonders

On this outing 32 CCHC members explored the town and outskirts of Santa Cruz.

Hiking in the Santa Cruz area during rainy weather offered a unique experience that combined the beauty of lush forests with the refreshing sound of rainfall. Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park and Wilder Ranch State Park became enchanting as mist settled among towering redwoods and ferns glistening with droplets. The rain intensified the earthy aroma of the woods and brought out vibrant colors, making every step feel like a new adventure.

Hikers were mindful of slippery paths and muddy conditions, so wearing waterproof gear and sturdy boots was essential. The rain also created temporary streams and waterfalls along some routes, enhancing the scenery but requiring extra caution. Despite the challenges, hiking in the rain in Santa Cruz was a memorable way to connect with nature and enjoy the tranquility of less crowded trails.

Hikers were provided with a variety of hiking options to accommodate their abilities. Hike leaders were Bill Chen, Yvonne Chen, Yeao-nan Hsieh, Yvonne Moss, Ed Osada, Angela Toy, Lynne Vogensen, and Helen Wong-Johe. 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 (Noël, Georgia, Lorena, Jan P, and Helen) and photos (Sylvia, Lois, Jan P, Angie, and Noël).

Sunday, April 19, 2026, Day 1
Año Nuevo State Park
Leader: Yvonne Moss

On the way to Santa Cruz 19 of the 32 CCHC hikers who were taking part in the club's outing in Santa Cruz and vicinity stopped at Año Nuevo State Park. After lunch on the deck near the Visitor Center, we set out for the beaches to see the elephant seal pups. After one mile we reached the staging area for the Año Nuevo Coast Nature Preserve. It has an outdoor display with information panels about marine mammals and is staffed by a park ranger who is there to answer any questions visitors might have.

From there we hiked to South Point, the first of three beaches where it was possible to observe elephant seal pups. Hike leader Yvonne Moss explained that the male elephant seals were long gone and that, after weaning them, the pups' mother had also left. She told us that the pups are called weaners, super weaners, and "double mother sucker" weaners. This last group are pups who have grown fat by getting milk from two different mothers. From South Point we had a good view of Año Nuevo Island, the site of an abandoned light station.

Next, we moved on to Bight Beach where we saw more weaners, including a pair of juvenile males who were play fighting. At Bight Beach we also saw arroyo willows with bright red galls on their leaves. From Steve Chun we learned that these galls are caused by an insect called the willow apple gall sawfly that lays its eggs on the leaves. Their larvae hatch and feed inside the galls. The galls are green when unoccupied and bright red when they contain a larva.



Weaned elephant seals on the beach at South Point

From Bight Beach we hiked back to the parking lot and continued on our way to Santa Cruz.

- Noël Siver

Monday, April 20, 2026, Day 2
Wilder Ridge Trail
Leaders: Ed Osada and Collette Cussary

Wilder Ranch State Park is located on the northern California coast, about four-and-a-half miles north of Santa Cruz. Eleven of us set out on an overcast morning for an eight-mile hike, knowing that rain was in the forecast but comfortable in the knowledge that we were prepared and expected to finish before the first drops fell.

The 7000 acres of the Wilder Ranch watershed have been the homeland to a variety of peoples. For centuries, the Ohlone had seasonal camps there where they hunted deer, elk, sea otters, and shellfish and traded with inland tribes. By the end of the 18th century, the Spanish had established missions and begun to settle in the area. They introduced cattle and the area became known as “the ranch of the streambed slaughtering ground.” In 1830 Maria Castro and her husband José Bolcoff became the first titled owners of record. They built sawmills and began to sell butter and cheese. Over the next 50 years, the land changed hands a number of times until 1885 when the Wilders became the owners. They worked the land for five generations as a farm and dairy until 1961 when the cost of taxes exceeded the farm income. In the 1970s a potential housing development raised the ire of Santa Cruz County citizens who voted to protect the ranch as open space. In 1974 the California State Parks acquired the land to “preserve the natural environment and cultural history.”

Our route on Wilder Ridge Trail began in the Wilder Dairy Cultural Preserve near the coast so that our views were of acres of green, thanks to the abundant recent rain, and also of the ocean on occasion. The trail was well maintained and we gradually gained elevation. After 2.5 miles we came to a choice: take a shortcut or stay on the intended longer trail. The majority vote was to take the long road (and we soon learned, also the less traveled). When we came to a section of tall grass, Ed Osada and Collette Cussary valiantly led the way. None of us realized how tall the

grass had grown with the rain or how little the trail had been maintained. Both sides of our narrow trail featured poison oak mixed with other greenery in great profusion. We marched on passing the local dump which we became aware of primarily through the pervasive odor. However, we also saw that a fence of sorts had been created by lining up the many surfboards that arrived at the dump so we had a colorful sight to distract from the smell.

Once out of the grass, it was time for lunch and our choice was flat ground out in the open. Shortly after beginning our lunch, it became apparent that we had gained some hitchhikers during our time in the grass. One person set the record of over 50 dog ticks on clothes and body while another had a mere dozen. Some of us had none but all of us were sure that we could feel something crawling on us! Our hike leaders reminded us to check for ticks upon our return and to be aware of the potential for the oil of poison oak on our clothes and gear. As we finished our lunch, the first drops of rain began to fall. But poison oak, ticks, and rain were not going to daunt us.



The rain picked up in intensity and we became a colorful parade of ponchos, rain jackets, backpack covers, and umbrellas. The hike ended where we began and we stopped by the historic horse barn where an employee was happy to share details of the barn architecture as well as the fact that the horse barn was built to house the Wilders'

polo horses. Polo was played on a large field, also on the property.

It is well worth a visit to this state park both for the hiking and for a couple of regular events. Every Saturday from 1 to 2:30 p.m. the park offers a Ranch History Tour which includes a peek in the Victorian homes and barns on the property. For a fuller experience, the first Saturday of every month, from 11 to 3, there is a living history event called Life on the Ranch and includes blacksmithing, machine shop demos, tours of the Victorian houses, crafts, and old-fashioned games. Both events are free but parking is \$10 unless you have a State Park Pass.

- Georgia Chun

Monday, April 20 2026, Day 2
Wilder Ranch State Park
Leaders: Yvonne Moss, Helen Wong Johe

Eighteen adventurous hikers dismounted their "buggies" and walked the Old Cove Landing Trail at Wilder Ranch State Park. The rolling trail followed the sea coast with beautiful

ocean bluffs, steep cliffs, and sounds of crashing ocean waves. Pink and white wild radishes as well as abundant yellow lupine dotted the trail.

A huge flight of pelicans flew overhead this sunny day. Brandt's cormorants were perched on the small rocky islands. Pigeon guillemots were paired up on the rocks. Mike Branning spotted a juvenile gray whale carcass on the beach below being devoured by the gulls. The most amazing thing was watching the harbor seals swim and nurse their young ones. We felt very fortunate to see this.



Harbor seal mothers and their pups

We visited the Wilder Ranch with many apple trees, goats, and chickens. The redwood barn dating back to 1826 is still being used for the animals and park officials. Come celebrate their 200-year anniversary on 4th of July.

- Lorena Kai

April 21, 2026, Day 3
Loma Prieta Loop, Nisene Marks State Park
Leader: Ed Osada

On Tuesday, April 21, Ed Osada guided a group of four hikers through the beautiful redwoods of Nisene Marks, despite the intermittent rain. We started our journey at the Entrance Station on Aptos Creek Road in Aptos, beginning on the Aptos Ranch Trail until it met up with the Aptos Creek Fire Road. We then followed the Loma Prieta Grade Trail to the Porter House Site in the area of a one-time townsite of 300 people. Passing by the Loma Prieta Mill Site, we saw the foundation of a former sawmill. We crossed several bridges and spotted spring wildflowers. The short Mill Pond Trail led us back to the Aptos Creek Fire Road. A beautiful hike from beginning to end in spite of getting drenched.

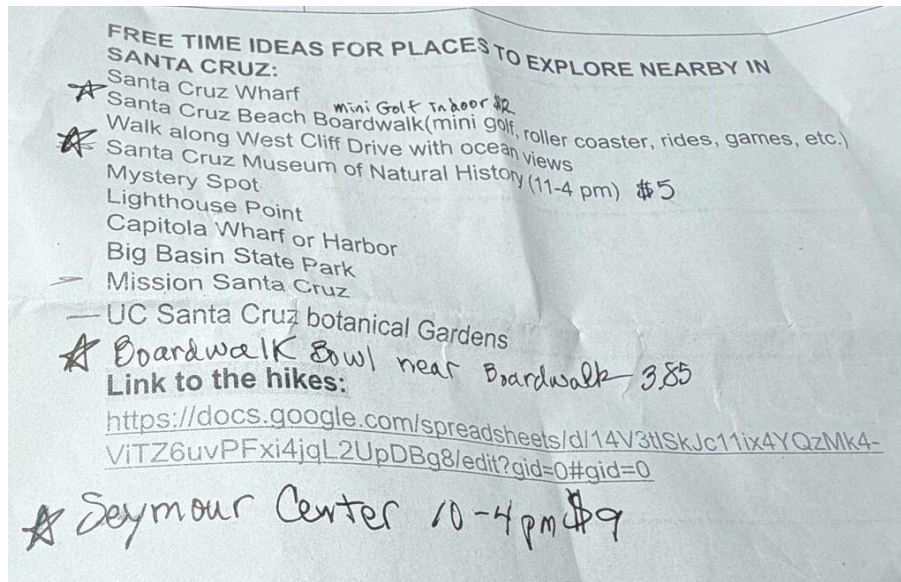


Jan and Diane

Thanks, Ed, for this special, moderate hike of approximately 7.5 miles.

- Jan Proudfoot

Our leader Angie found some options for those of us who wanted to stay out of the rain.



Seymour Marine Discovery Center



Museum of Natural History

Wednesday, April 22, 2026
Observation Deck Loop, Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park
Leaders: Yvonne Moss and Yvonne Chen



Hikers in their rain gear before the start of the hike

With hopes of spring showers abating, 14 hikers headed to Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park under rainy skies. We hiked a loop along the San Lorenzo River Trail from the Visitors Center to the Observation Deck Overlook, approximately six miles with very steep steps.



Heading up the trail

The rain made lunch a challenge with no shelter available. However, we took refuge in the campground shower facilities, which were dry and featured benches to sit on.

Finally, the rain abated and we continued in sunshine, taking stock of wildflowers including sticky monkey-flower, bush poppy, and yerba santa. A beautiful hike rain or shine! Thank you to leaders Yvonne Moss and Yvonne Chen!

- Karen Arntzen

April 22, 2026, Day 4
Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park
Bennet Creek Trail
Barrel Mills Loop
Leaders: Bill Chen and Yeao-nan Hsieh

Wednesday morning 18 intrepid hikers dared to challenge themselves on a 6-mile hike following a day full of rain. Woe to those who trust weather forecasts as we were expecting light rain to end soon after commencing the hike.

Nevertheless, rain jackets were zipped, rain ponchos donned, umbrellas up and hiking sticks out, we ventured forth in the quiet of the forest only interrupted by the pitter patter of rain drops on our heads. Perambulating along we encountered trillium, carpets of sorrel, thimbleberry bushes, a yellow wild iris spotted by Collette, and California wild rose identified by Steve. Such a dainty little flower it was.

Plop, plop, here comes the rain, doggedly we continued on passing the remnants of the lime kilns now hidden under layers of moss and ferns. These kilns used high heat of over 2000 degrees F to burn redwood producing lime from the quarries nearby.

Onward we went completing our loop to the Barrel Mill ruins. The mill manufactured parts for the barrels used for shipping lime. Displayed were old stone foundations, remnants of a stave machine, and rusted equipment. Returning on the same trail, some stopped for lunch under a small canopy of trees while others sandwiched together under an informational sign with a mini-roof.

All along we encountered rushing water in the creek and many resultant waterfalls. Ending our hike involved crossing a few wooden bridges and delicately traversing large branches across two

creeks. Agile and nimble we were as no one landed in the water! And of course, our constant companion the rain departed as we were ending our journey.

Thanks to our leaders, Bill Chen and Yeao-nan Hsieh for an interesting and climate-challenging hike.

Signing off, Helen Wong Johe



Angie enjoying the rain



Lorena, Jan, etc.



Bill and group at lime kilns

Group dinner that evening at the Water Street Grill in Santa Cruz



Water Street Grill
503 Water Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060



Seasoned sirloin steak



Chicken piccata