

Activities in and near Caspar
By Eric Goldman (egoldman@gmail.com)
April 2024

Jug Handle State Reserve. You can stroll the headlands, visit the beach, and hike the “ecological staircase” (5 miles RT). The staircase hike traverses five former coastal terraces (uplifted by tectonics) that have evolved over the millennia into diverse ecosystems, from pine to fir to redwood, culminating in a “pygmy” forest. It’s not as visually interesting as it sounds, but it’s still worth the visit.

Caspar Headlands State Beach. Caspar’s headlands were the old mill’s site. They are not as scenic as the Mendocino headlands, but they are uncrowded.

From Headlands Drive, you can access an overlook of the sea lion rookery and usually see some harbor seals as well.

Mendocino Botanical Gardens. The famous rhododendrons bloom in May. The other collections are small but lovely.

Russian Gulch State Park. Russian Gulch is one of the world-renowned state parks on the Mendocino Coast. You can hike up Fern Canyon to the waterfall (5.5-6 miles RT) and walk around the headlands. Do both!



Insider’s tip: if you have limited time, you can reach the waterfall in a 2 mile RT hike from the park’s North Boundary. It’s not as scenic as hiking up Fern Canyon, but it’s quicker and less crowded. Take County Road 409 to the end of the pavement.

Point Cabrillo Lighthouse. A short walk leads to a charming lighthouse and lightkeepers’ residences on a windswept coastal bluff.

Mendocino Headlands State Park. These world-famous headlands feature thrilling ocean views, charming village scenes, and flowers year-round. It is fabulous any time of day, any season, in any weather. You can also hike up the Big River for a while.



Van Damme State Park. Another of Mendocino Coast's world-renowned state parks. The main attraction is Fern Canyon, one of several so-named canyons on the North Coast (my favorite is in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park north of Eureka). Unfortunately, Fern Canyon access has been limited due to storm damage. Check before you go. The park also has an easy-to-reach pygmy forest with a short boardwalk stroll.

Spring Ranch Nature Reserve. A relatively new and unheralded park just north of Van Damme State Park. Trails lead through the grasslands to unspoiled beaches you'll likely have to yourself.

Glass Beach (Fort Bragg). Another world-famous destination. Seaglass washes up from the local trash dump, so it's a little less romantic than it sounds. Old photos show the beach carpeted with colorful seaglass, but you won't see that due to years of heavy beachcombing. It's still an excellent destination for its seastacks, tidepools, and beachcombing.



Insider's tip: low tide has more seaglass and better tidepools.

The Skunk Train. The Skunk Train is a charming, scenic, and pricey train ride through the redwoods. Reservations recommended. For

something different, try a railbike. The train doesn't connect Fort Bragg to Willits, so trips are out-and-back from your departure station.

Pomo Bluffs Park. Another nice headlands option in Fort Bragg.

MacKerricher State Park. Coast and beach access north of Fort Bragg. The "Ten Mile Beach" section (actually four miles) includes an estuary and sand dunes.

Mendocino Woodlands State Park. Virtually unknown to tourists, this state park covers the upper Big River. It has hiking trails through second-growth redwood forests.

Jackson Demonstration State Forest. This sprawling state forest has many recreational options, including waterfall hikes.

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Mendocino County community events are usually small-scale and fun. Check out <https://www.visitmendocino.com/events/> to see what events are taking place around the county during your trip.

Some noteworthy events:

- On first Fridays of the month, check out the First Friday Art Walk in downtown Fort Bragg 5-8 pm.
- The entire coast celebrates whale festivals in mid-March.
- The Mendocino Film Festival occurs in late Spring.
<https://mendofilm.org/>.
- Over Labor Day, Fort Bragg celebrates Paul Bunyan Days.
<https://paulbunyandays.com/>.
- As part of the Mendocino Open Paint Out, in September, plein-air artists paint all around Mendocino village and will talk with you about their work.
- Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens has a Festival of Lights. Also look for the Fort Bragg lighted truck and boat parades.

Further Afield from Caspar

NOTE: Mendocino County has several charming but tiny towns worth visiting if you're in the area, such as Boonville, Elk, Point Arena, and Gualala.

Montgomery Woods. The 2-mile loop through an old-growth redwood grove will be one of the best short hikes you'll ever take. Go at off-peak times and you will have the trees to yourself.

Insider's tip: redwood forests sparkle in the sun and are ethereal when shrouded in fog.

Hendy Woods State Park. The Little Hendy and Big Hendy old-growth redwood groves are terrific. Visit both. The park entrance is just off Highway 128 in the Anderson Valley.



Wine Tasting. Mendocino County has 500+ vineyards and 100+ wineries. There are 30+ tasting rooms in Anderson Valley along Highway 128. See <https://avwines.com/tasting-rooms/>.

Point Arena Lighthouse. An interesting lighthouse with amazing views on the tower tour.

B. Bryan Preserve (Point Arena). An African safari in Mendocino County. Even if it's warm at the start, prepare for blustery conditions.

Bowling Ball Beach. South of Point Arena, at low tide you can see stone formations that look like bowling balls.

Avenue of the Giants. One of the world's great driving tours. The road follows the Eel River through redwood nirvana, dotted with quaint towns and tourist traps. All 8 designated stops are great. Our favorites are the Founder's Grove and the Gould Grove trail across from the visitor's center. Neighboring Humboldt Redwoods State Park has the world's largest remaining old-growth redwood forest.

Food

Groceries. Safeway in Fort Bragg is the chain grocery store. Harvest Market, in Fort Bragg and Mendocino, is the local specialty store with premium offerings and prices. Natural foods stores include Down to Earth in Fort Bragg and Corners of the Mouth in Mendocino (in one of the most beautiful grocery store buildings you'll ever see).

The nearest Costco is in Ukiah (80 minutes). The nearest Trader Joe's is in Santa Rosa (130 minutes).

Farmers' Markets. Fort Bragg has a year-round farmers' market on Wednesday afternoons. Mendocino has a farmers' market Friday afternoons May to October.

Restaurants. Check out Good Bones Inn in Caspar for its food, bread, and live music. Other favorites (all in Mendocino village):

- Fog Eater Café. (Mostly) vegan Southern food.
- Good Life Café and Bakery. Everything on the menu is great, including the baked goods.
- Mendocino Café. Pan-Californian cuisine.
- Café Beaujolais. Excellent breads. Check out the brickery pizzas and garden smash specials. Reservations recommended for café fine dining.
- Ravens at Stanford Inn. Its vegan menu is renowned worldwide.