

# San Mateo Coast Sector State Park Units

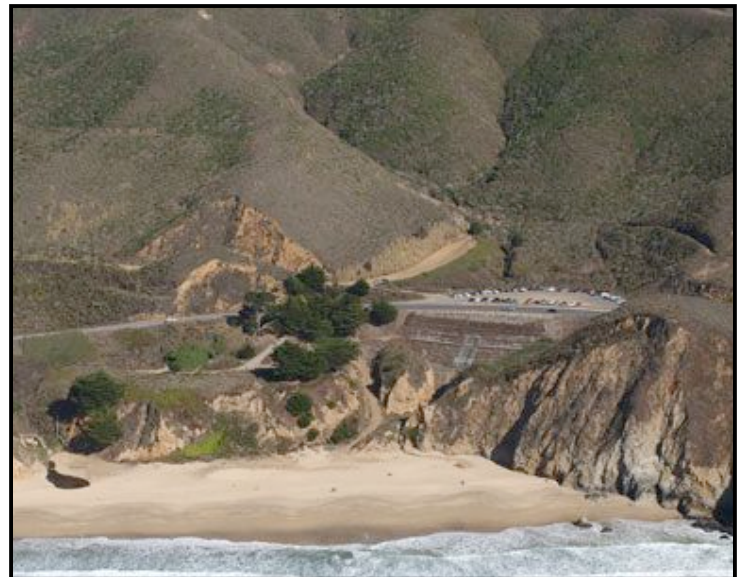
The San Mateo Coast Sector contains a wide variety of park units, which offer a range of recreational activities and natural and cultural treasures.

The following rules, regulations, and recommendations apply to all local State Park units:

- Dogs are prohibited on all the state beaches in the sector with the exception of Montara State Beach, Bean Hollow State Beach, and Pebble Beach, where they are allowed provided they are controlled with a leash of no more than six feet at all times.
- No beach fires are allowed on any of the beaches.
- Visitors should not remove shells, driftwood, or other natural features from park units.
- Fireworks are prohibited in all State Parks.
- It is illegal to approach or harass marine mammals or other wild animals or birds.
- Swimming is not recommended at any of the local beaches because of the hazardous surf, recurring rip currents, and chilling 50-degree temperatures.
- The weather can be changeable; layered clothing is recommended.

## ***Gray Whale Cove State Beach***

A small, sheltered beach (about 500 feet long), situated at the bottom of steep bluffs that shield it from view of Highway 1. A steep trail leads down to the beach. There is a small picnic area on the bluff above. The beach is named for the frequent sightings of gray whales from the beach. In spring, wildflowers brighten the bluffs above the beach. The granitic rocks of Montara Mountain are the main source of sand for the beach.



**Telephone:** 650-726-8819

**Operating hours:** Day-use area, 8:00 to sunset.

**Location/Directions:** North of Montara on Highway 1, just south of Devil's Slide. Parking is on the east side of the highway and crossing to the beach can be difficult and dangerous.

### **Facilities**

Free entrance and parking. Portable toilets.

Picnic tables.

Dogs are prohibited at all times.

## Montara State Beach



Montara State Beach is a wide sandy beach about eight-tenths of a mile long. The south end of Montara Beach has rich but mostly inaccessible tide pools. Harbor seals occasionally haul out at Montara. The beach is bounded by low hills both to the north and south. Montara Mountain (or McNee Ranch)—also part of Montara State Beach—is described separately. The granitic rocks of Montara Mountain are the main source of sand for this beach. Since the sand travels such a short distance, the grains have not had a chance to weather into fine particles and tend to be quite coarse.

**Telephone:** 650-726-8819

**Operating hours:** Day-use area, 8:00-sunset.

**Location/Directions:** North of Montara on Highway 1, approximately 20 miles south of San Francisco and eight miles north of Half Moon Bay. There are two beach access points from the bluff area via stairs. One access is off Highway 1 across from Second Street; the second access is located about a half mile north on the ocean side of highway. The beach can also be reached by a rough dirt trail just north of the south stairs.

### Facilities

Free entrance and parking. Portable toilets.

Dogs are permitted provided they are controlled with a leash of no more than six feet at all times.

### Features



The wide bluffs above the beach feature a wide variety of coastal wildflowers, including California poppies, coast angelica, seaside daisy (pictured at left), Hooker's evening primrose, and Wight's paintbrush. In the summer, blue and white blooms of agapanthus (also called "lily of the Nile") recall the days when the showy South African flowers were grown as a commercial crop nearby.

Springs and small streams that cut through the high cliffs along the beach provide habitat for other native plants, including the large monkey flower (pictured at right).



## Point Montara Lighthouse

A lighthouse at Point Montara, south of Montara Beach, offers overnight accommodations. The Point Montara Fog Signal and Light Station was established in 1875. The historic lighthouse and turn-of-the-century buildings have been preserved and restored by Hostelling International-American Youth Hostels (HI-AYH) (<http://www.hiusa.org/>) and the California Department of Parks and Recreation, in cooperation with the U. S. Coast Guard, which operates the lighthouse. The hostel is open year round.

**Telephone:** (650) 728-7177

**Fax:** (650) 728-7058

**Mail Address:** P. O. Box 737, Montara, CA 94037

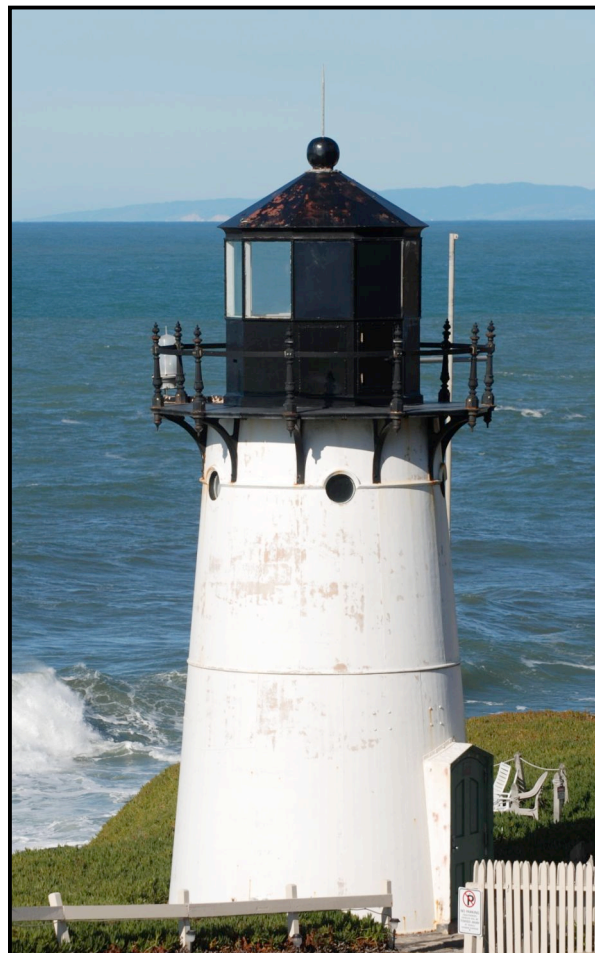
**Web:** [www.norcalhostels.org/montara](http://www.norcalhostels.org/montara)

**Email:** [himontara@norcalhostels.org](mailto:himontara@norcalhostels.org)

**Office hours:** 7:30 am-10:30 pm

**Access hours:** 9:30 am-sunset

**Location/Directions:** South of Montara State Beach at 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Highway 1, between Montara and Moss Beach.



### Facilities

The hostel has 36 dorm-style beds and five private rooms. Its facilities include a kitchen, meeting room, storage lockers, laundry, and parking. It is wheelchair accessible. Reservations are essential April through September and on weekends. They may be made by mail or phone with a credit card—Master Card or VISA.

### Features

A small cove beach, with tide pools at low tide, can be accessed from the lighthouse grounds. Visitors can view video, taken by the Common Murre Restoration Project, of a sea bird colony located directly below Devil's Slide, a few miles north off Highway 1. Refreshments are available at an Espresso Bar located in the hostel office.

## **McNee Ranch**

McNee Ranch, part of Montara State Beach, is located on the west face of Montara Mountain, north of Half Moon Bay and south of Pacifica. The mountain is a northern spur of the Santa Cruz Mountains and features the only undisturbed coastal mountain habitat found on over 100 miles of coastline. It is an ecological island of natural biological diversity. Its steep slopes have minimized human impact, and it is home to plant and animal communities found nowhere else in the world.



The park is open to hiking, biking, horseback riding, and walking dogs on leash. The trails are moderate to rigorous, offering spectacular views of the coast. Park trails lead to North Peak (1,898 feet) where, on a clear day, you can see the Pacific, San Francisco Bay, Point Reyes, and Mount Diablo. Be prepared for the weather to change quickly with incoming fog and wind, or simply from elevation changes. Wear sturdy shoes with good traction, as the steep trails can get very slippery.

**Telephone:** 650-726-8819

**Operating hours:** Day-use area, 8:00-sunset.

**Location/Directions:** Approximately 20 miles south of San Francisco; eight miles north of Half Moon Bay. A few cars can park at the Martini Creek entrance, located on the east side of Highway 1, just north of the town of Montara, across from Montara State Beach. Cars can also park in the Montara Beach lots or in the Gray Whale Cove Beach parking lot. The Gray Whale Cove lot is the trailhead for the Gray Whale Cove Trail into the McNee Ranch.



## Facilities

No parking or entrance fees.

Chemical toilets located by the ranger residence. No water or public phones.

A few picnic tables and benches are available near the trails.

Hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding are allowed on some trails and roads, as indicated on the maps at the trailheads. Use courtesy on the trails, travel at a safe speed, and announce yourself when approaching others.

Dogs are permitted provided they are controlled with a leash of no more than six feet at all times.

## Features

Montara Mountain, made up of both McNee Ranch and San Pedro Valley County Park, is a veritable ecological island surrounded by development. The plant communities found there include coastal scrub and coastal chaparral (the only location on the San Mateo coast). Small riparian corridors can be found in gulches, and spring wildflowers (like the checkerbloom picture on this page and the Douglas iris on the next page) can be found gracing the ocean bluffs and blooming in profusion on the hills of McNee Ranch.



Montara Mountain is granitic, a rare feature along this stretch of coast. This unique soil composition—along with the variety of other soil types, exposures, and elevations—is probably the reason for the plant diversity found here, including some rare and endangered plants.

One rare species is the Montara manzanita (*Arctostaphylos montaraensis*), which occurs only on Montara Mountain and nearby San Bruno Mountain. This beautiful red-barked shrub can grow up to 20 feet tall. It can be found in chaparral areas along with giant chinquapin, toyon, coffeeberry, and ceanothus.

A close relative of the common yellow bush lupine, Montara Mountain blue bush lupine (*Lupinus eximus*) is another rare species only found on Montara Mountain. It has bluish purplish flowers and distinctive reddish stems.



One very rare and endangered plant—a yellow-flowered member of the phlox family, *Linanthus croceus*—has been found on a coastal bluff below Montara Mountain. The only previously known population of this plant was found in 1998 on Point San Pedro at the south end of Pacifica.



Another interesting plant is Pacific stone crop (*Sedum spathulifolium*). Although the plant itself is not rare, it is the only host plant for the endangered San Bruno Mountain elfin butterfly, which lives there.

McNee Ranch is a great place for birding. Keep your eyes open for California quail (see picture), ravens, flickers, hummingbirds, wrentits, and other species. The number of hawks jumps in fall as they migrate south along the Pacific flyway.

Look for tracks of coyotes, foxes, bobcats, deer, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, and other small mammals. Mountain lions live in the area, but are rarely sighted.

## History

Duncan McNee was an early California land baron, and the McNee Ranch was a small portion of his 800,000-acre holdings. Born in Canada in 1849, he came to San Francisco in 1864, where he first worked as a clerk in the U. S. Land Office, and then started a dredging business. Later he invested in mines, oil fields, and timber throughout the West, and is said to have owned mineral rights to 14,000 acres in California.

A portion of what is now McNee Ranch was part of the Rancho San Pedro Mexican land grant, which was deeded to Francisco Sanchez. His home, the Sanchez Adobe, still stands in Pacifica. The land that comprises McNee Ranch was used for cattle grazing from Spanish times until fairly recently. American ranchers also grew grain and hay on the slopes. In the 1950s, it was part of a dairy ranch.

The military commandeered the ranch during World War II, building bunkers that can still be seen above Gray Whale Cove Overlook, as well as atop the promontories above Devil's Slide and Gray Whale Cove. Locals were warned not to trespass, and with good reason. The ranch became a commando-training center where live ammunition was used.

The State of California purchased the 625-acre ranch in the late 1970s and officially opened it as part of the State Park in 1984.

This rugged mountain has always been difficult to cross, and traces of trails and roads dating from native, Spanish, and Mexican times still crisscross the land. At the turn of the century, it often took two full days for farmers to deliver their goods from Half Moon Bay to San Francisco. Because of this limited access, while San Francisco and the Peninsula were beginning to boom with development, the San Mateo Coast was left in relative isolation.

The first roads were terrifying to travel by car. Heavily laden farm trucks wrecked the road surface, and routes originally built for foot traffic and horses confounded drivers with their steep grades and sharp curves. Accidents were commonplace.

The Ocean Shore Railroad (1907-1920) opened the San Mateo coast to tourism and development, and provided a huge boost to agriculture. Farmers suddenly had quick access to markets, and could sell perishables like artichokes and other vegetables. Eventually the popularity of the automobile and Ocean Shore's financial troubles spelled the end of the coastal railroad.



Even today's modern engineering has not overcome this treacherous bit of coastline. Highway 1 is perilously etched into soft sandstone and shale on the notorious Devil's Slide. After decades of controversy, a tunnel is being constructed to bypass this dangerous stretch of roadway (estimated completion in 2010).