

2022



THE AREA

Where to take a walk without worrying about it being spoiled

By SALLY BAHO

ALTHOUGH IT'S golf mania on the Peninsula this week, there are plenty of trails to stretch your legs and get your heart pumping off the green.

Whether you're a devoted fan or have come along for the ride, here are some suggestions for beautiful hiking trails unique to our neck of the woods.

If the sea is your favorite hiking companion, two places where you can practically have it in your lap are Asilomar State

Park in Pacific Grove, and Point Lobos State Natural Reserve just a few miles south of Pebble Beach on Highway 1.

Asilomar, a conference center as well as a state park, is almost as well known for its classic California architecture as for its stunning location. Ranger-led tours of the property have been suspended because of the pandemic, but three self-guided tours are available on your mobile phone: the Julia Morgan Architecture Tour, the Coast Trail, and the Dunes Preserve. The

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PHOTO: FINE CONE/PAC

In early summer, California poppies embellish the stunning oceanfront vistas at Point Lobos, just a few miles from the Pebble Beach golf course.

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tours are free, and each stop on the tours includes a 2- to 3-minute narrative. There's free parking on the beach, where Sunset Drive meets Ocean View Boulevard in Pacific Grove, or you could drive right onto the conference grounds and park in the visitor lot. The boardwalk over gently rolling white sand dunes is the perfect coastal stroll and a spectacular place to catch the sunset. Visit parks.ca.gov for more information.

Crown jewel

Point Lobos State Natural Reserve is often referred to as "the crown jewel of the State Park system." It offers dramatic ocean views, tree-lined trails, hidden coves, plenty of history and a majestic level of beach access.

The point is named for the sea lions ("lobos marinos" in Spanish) that congregate on the rocks just offshore. In addition, you can spot seals, sea otters, many species of seabirds, and if you're lucky, migrating grey whales from December through May. Parking spaces fill up rapidly, and admission is \$10 per car (with a discount for seniors), or you can park along Highway 1 near the park entrance and hike in for free. Visit parks.ca.gov/?page_id=571 for more information.

If mountains are what you seek, then Jacks Peak Park is a great pick, offering stunning views of the Monterey Peninsula and 8.5 miles of horseback riding and hiking trails. This is a mountainous trail near the Monterey Regional Airport that leads to a high point on the Peninsula (1,078 feet), and is named after David Jacks, a Scotsman who settled in Monterey in 1850 and became a successful businessman and landowner. In fact, his is the name behind Monterey Jack — the creamy white cheese that was produced at his local dairies. Brochures for the Skyline Self-Guided Nature Trail should be available at the park's entrance and can be found online at bit.ly/3oaytXM. Pack

a picnic — don't forget the cheese — and enjoy the views, but be careful not to step on a banana slug. The bright yellow mollusks are often found oozing along the trail.

If you venture out Carmel Valley Road, you'll find Palo Corona, just a mile from Highway 1, and Garland Park in the heart of Carmel Valley. Palo Corona Regional Park is the result of the largest land conservation project in Monterey County, where the 10,000-acre Palo Corona Ranch was acquired by The Nature Conservancy, the Big Sur Land Trust, the State of California, and the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District. The most popular trail leads from Carmel Valley Road, through the former Rancho Cañada golf course and across the Carmel River to Inspiration Point. It's a moderately strenuous 4- or 5-mile roundtrip hike through rolling hills with beautiful views of Carmel and the coast.

Access to the trails is at the park entrance near the Community Church of the Monterey Peninsula off Carmel Valley Road. Visit mrrpd.org/palo-corona-regional-park to learn more.

Garland Ranch Regional Park is beloved by locals. Fondly referred to as the "granddaddy" of the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District's properties as its first acquisition, purchased in 1975 from William Garland II, a prosperous Southern California community leader who spent many a summer "on the ranch." The park spans an elevation of 200 to 2,000 feet, from the willow-covered banks of the Carmel River to cottonwoods and sycamores. The park traverses dense oak woodlands, ravines and meadows. The views of Carmel Valley are breathtaking, although you might find yourself walking through swarms of oak moths — but don't worry, they're harmless. To learn more, go to mrrpd.org/garland-ranch-regional-park.

Leash laws vary

All the parks are well maintained, and the trails are cleared regularly. If you've got your four-legged best friend with you, all the parks mentioned (except Point Lobos) allow dogs in at least some portion of the properties, although leash laws vary. It's best to check the signage or

read the park's website in advance. Look out for poison oak, which can be plentiful.

There is no shortage of either golf courses or parks on the Monterey Peninsula, so if you tire of the green, you can find refuge on the trails. After all, life is about balance.

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The effort that goes into supporting the players is almost as interesting as the game itself. Caddies, for example, do significant homework to make sure they can provide their golfers with good information about every hole on every course. "About 95 percent of the pros bring their own caddies," Russo said.

And according to tournament spokesperson Lesley Varney, "Amateur caddies are a mix of friends and family of the players and local caddies from Pebble Beach." That could be a plus, as those Pebble Beach folks doubtless know the courses better than anyone.

Pit crew

Manufacturer and vendor vans start arriving several days before tournament play begins, bringing golf balls, gloves, clubs and other gear for players who need it. Pros are allowed as many as 14 clubs in their bag for each round, but they can get damaged — maybe hitting a tree while following through, for example. Not only can some of the vendors do repairs, they can even make a new custom club.

"It's like having your own pit crew," said Russo.

He concluded by encouraging everyone to enjoy the simple things about a tournament in a location so stunning that it can distract even seasoned professionals. "Enjoy the scenery, the atmosphere. Don't get so caught up in the score that you miss the magic. These are some of the best players in the game," so just let it all soak in.