

Grandad's Guide for

Fun in West Marin





West Marin has it all, towering redwood forests, meandering creeks, and beautiful beaches.

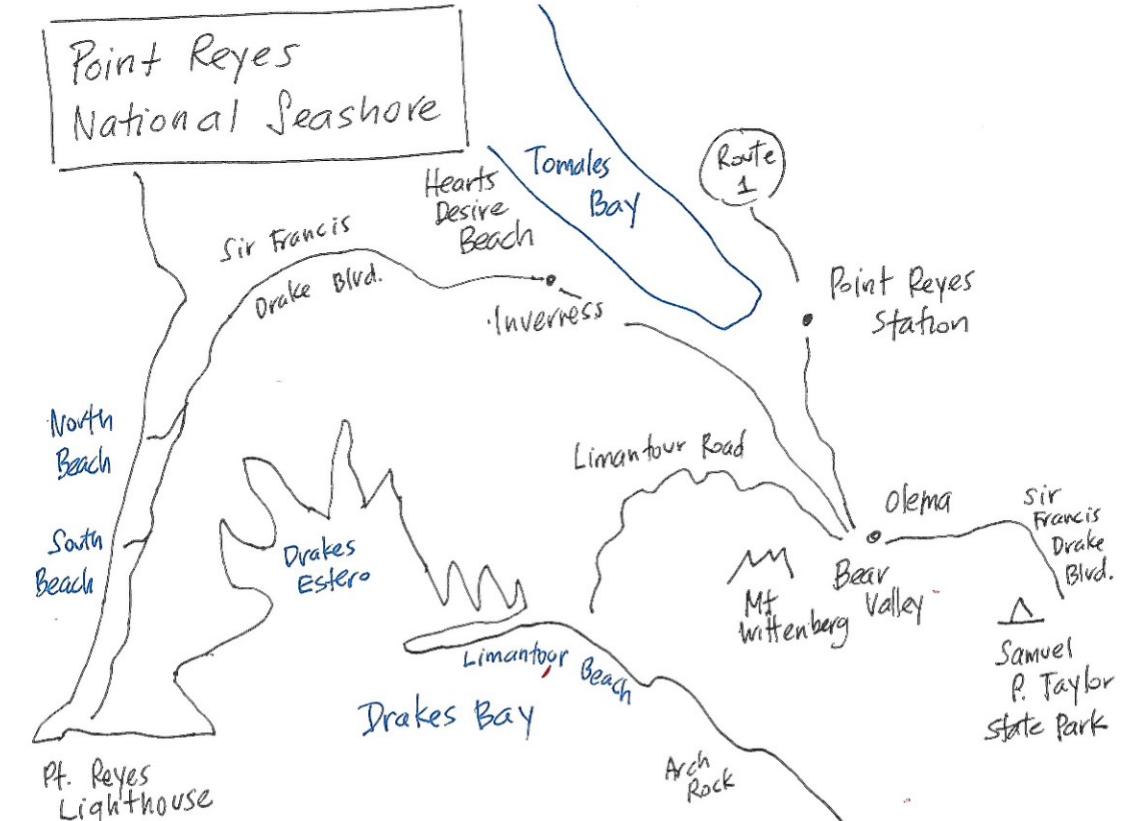
It's the prettiest nature nearby the Bay. It's a place only an hour from Oakland, one which four generations of our family have enjoyed.

You can picnic or camp at Samuel P. Taylor State Park, hike the Bear Valley Trail, or stroll along the shoreline of the Point Reyes peninsula.

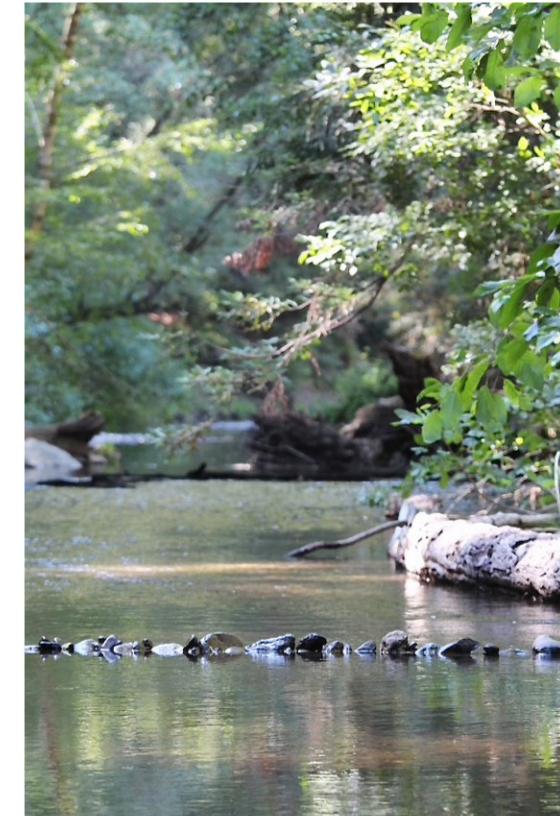
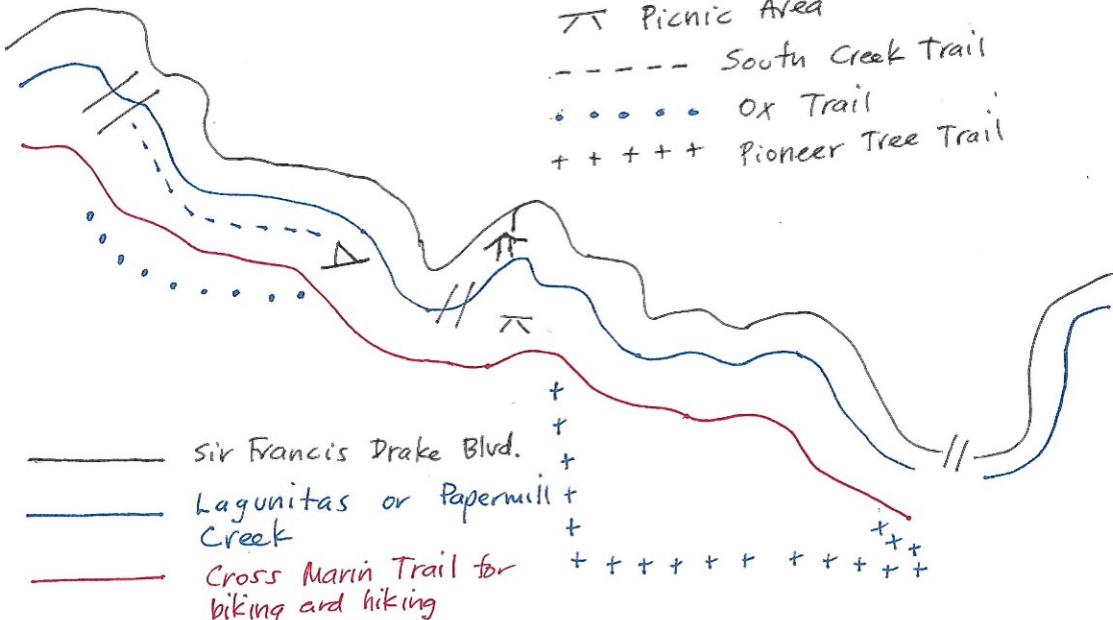
Whether by car, bike, or on foot you can explore West Marin's natural beauty or visit its cute small towns.

You can take little ones to dip their toes into Tomales Bay at Hearts Desire Beach or challenge growing kids with a backpacking trek up Mount Wittenberg.

Enjoy the spots I've highlighted in *Grandad's Guide for Fun in West Marin*. And find new places, for new adventures, too.



Samuel P. Taylor State Park



Samuel P. Taylor State Park is a great place for a picnic under the redwood canopy. Nearby Lagunitas creek (aka Papermill creek) is perfect for wading or skipping rocks.

If you plan to camp, reserve a site on our favorite Creekside loop. The Orchard Hill loop is nice, too, with sites nestled among the redwoods. It's a popular camping spot, so be sure to check availability months ahead.

The Cross Marin Trail runs through the park. There are no cars on this wide paved path, which is lots of fun for bikers, joggers, and casual walkers.

From the Cross Marin Trail, you can access some pretty hiking trails. For example, the flat South Creek Trail meanders along the stream for about a mile. It's nice for short legs.

When you reach the bridge at the west end of the park, you can take the steps down to the creek. Brave souls can even swim in the cold, deep green, pools below the bridge.



Hikers can return to campsites on the South Creek Trail or walk back through the redwood forest on the Ox Trail. This rustic pathway climbs above the Cross Marin Trail and ends at the two camping loops. It is only a mile and a half walk.

The Pioneer Tree Trail is a little more challenging. The trail begins near the picnic area on the Cross Marin Trail. It winds up Wildcat Canyon for about a half mile until it flattens out along the ridge, finally dropping back down near Shafter Bridge. Just take the Cross Marin Trail back to your camping area for a three mile round-trip hike.

The Pioneer Tree Trail winds amid towering redwoods and Douglas fir trees. It is lined with lush ferns. The hike is too tough for little children, but it's good practice for older kids who want to be backpackers.



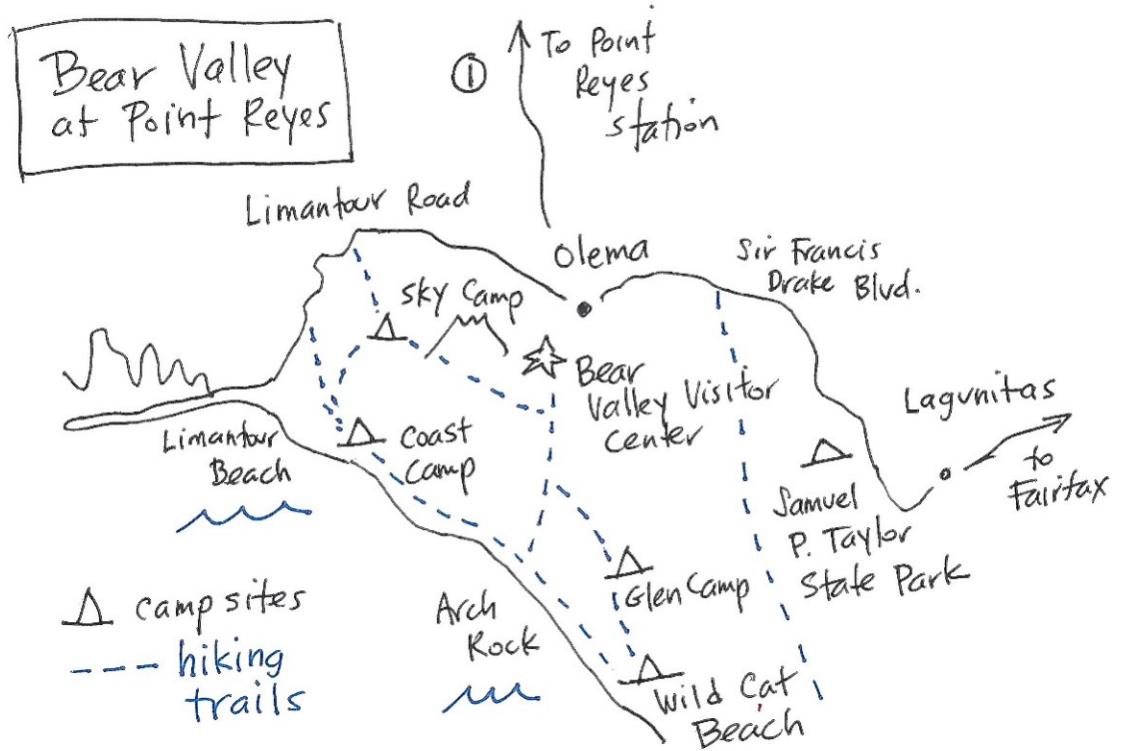


There are a few hidden gems near the park, too. For example, on a hot summer day you can take your kids to the Inkwells, the natural swimming holes fed by Kent Lake.

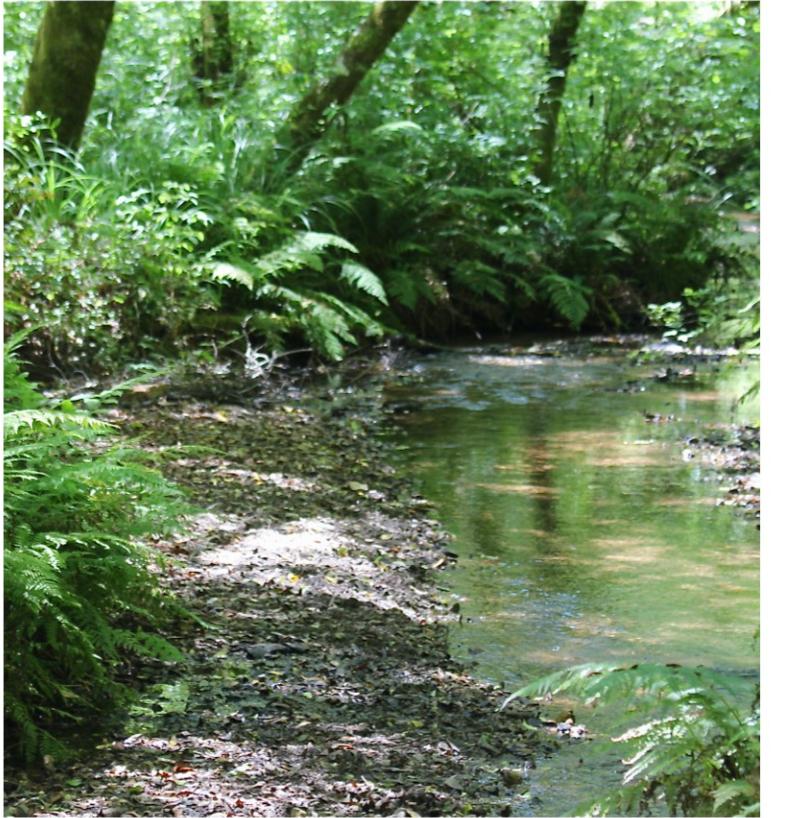
Across the street from Inkwells is the Leo T. Cronin Fish Viewing Area. During the winter the Coho salmon return to Lagunitas creek to spawn. You can see colorful salmon from November through January.

If you spend a little time at Samuel P. Taylor you'll want to make a trip to the Lagunitas Grocery Store. It is just a few miles east of the park on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. The store sells wood for the campfire, ice cream for hungry hikers, and nice wine for the adults relaxing at the end of the day.

You'll find Samuel P. Taylor State Park is a great home base to explore Bear Valley and the Point Reyes National Seashore, just a few miles west.



Bear Valley at Point Reyes has lots of fun activities for young and old. It's only a 20 minute drive west from Samuel P. Taylor State Park through the small town of Olema. The Bear Valley Visitor Center has a nature center, featuring local flora and fauna and a small bookshop. Behind the Visitor Center you can walk up the hill to see the Morgan horses or visit Kule Loklo, a recreated Coast Miwok Native American village. Nearby, take a short educational walk along the Earthquake Trail, situated on the San Andreas fault.



Bear Valley is a hub for hikers and backpackers. The trailhead begins at the Visitor Center. Take the Bear Valley Trail almost four and a half miles to the ocean. The wide dirt trail follows a beautiful stream. Half way is Divide Meadow, a nice spot to stop to rest or picnic. The remaining journey ends at Arch Rock. From here you can return to the trailhead or take a longer hike north or south on the Coast Trail.

For those who want to backpack, the Bear Valley trailhead is the doorway to four campsites: Glen Camp located among the trees, Wildcat Beach and Coast campsites situated near beaches, and Sky Camp perched on Mount Wittenberg. Be sure to apply for a camping permit before your trip.

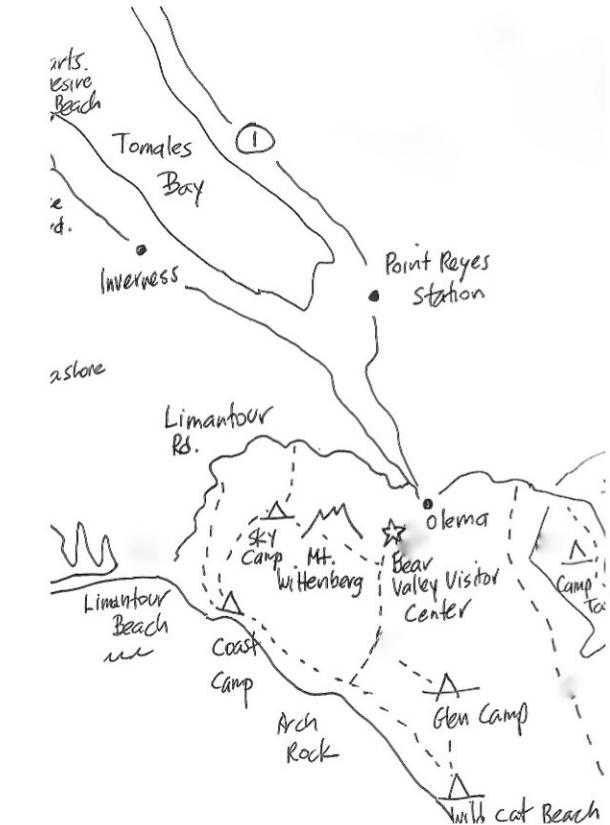


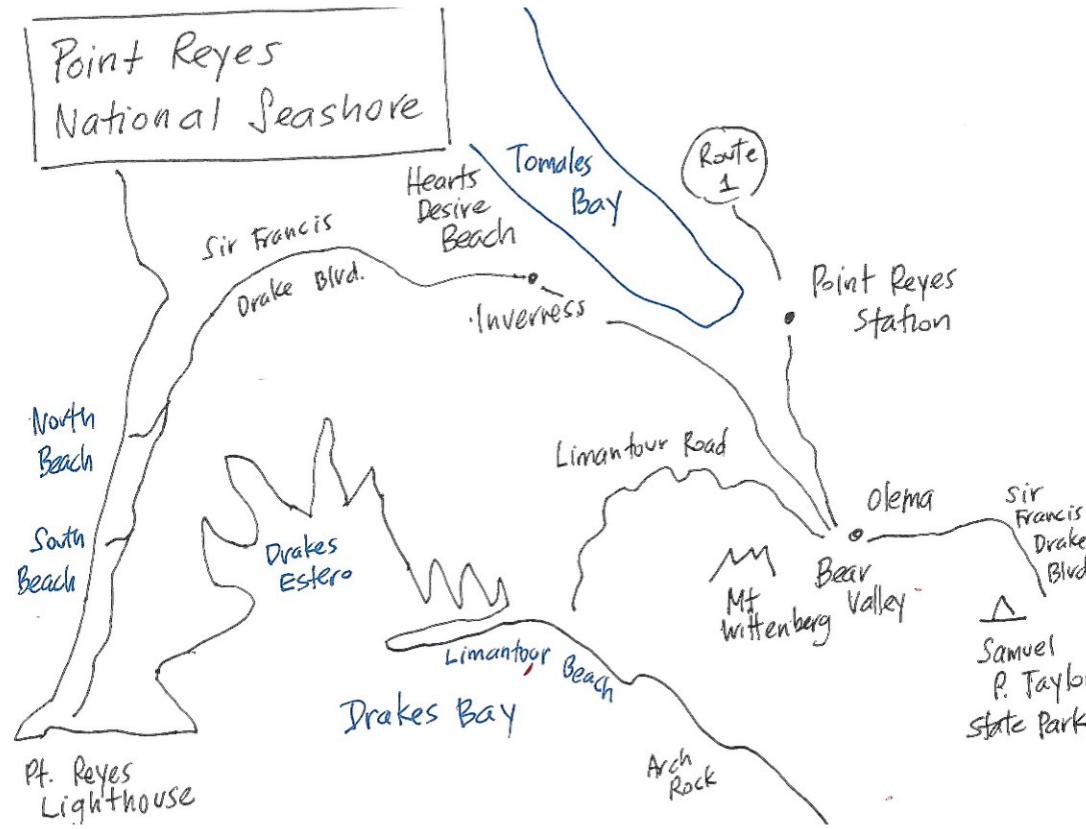


If you want a hike through the rolling hills of West Marin, try the Bolinas Ridge Trail. It is halfway between Samuel P. Taylor State Park and the Bear Valley Visitor Center on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. You can walk as far as you'd like, with views of Elephant Mountain and the Point Reyes region. No doubt, you'll see some curious cows, too.

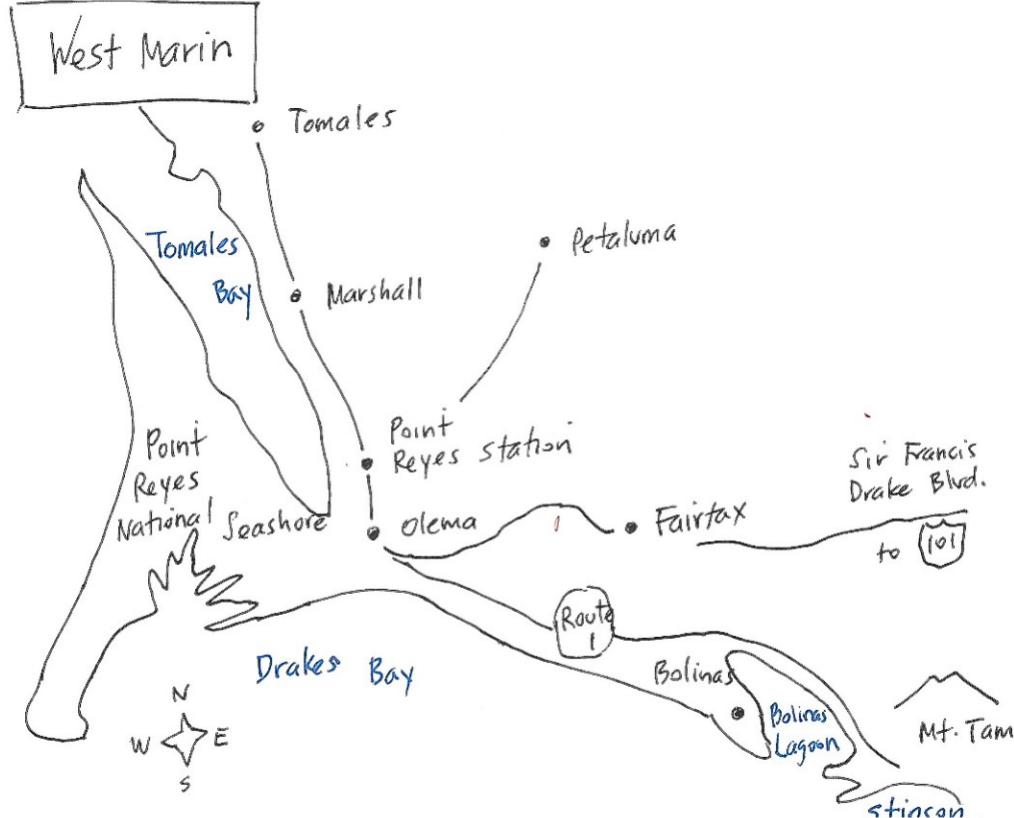
If you feel more like the beach, it is just 20 minutes away. From the Bear Valley Visitor Center, take Limantour Road to Limantour Beach.

Along Limantour Road are trailheads to Coast Camp and Sky Camp. These hikes to the campsites are shorter than those from the Bear Valley trailhead. These trails are good alternatives for young ones who want to try backpacking for the first time.





The Point Reyes National Seashore is blessed with beautiful beaches. In addition to Limantour Beach, you can drive out to the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to visit North Beach or South Beach. At the end of the Pt. Reyes peninsula is the Pt. Reyes Light House. Here, you can often see elephant seals, and in the winter months it is a good spot for whale watching. If you want a beach without waves, try Hearts Desire Beach on Tomales Bay. Your little ones can play in the sand and safely wade into the water.



West Marin has some charming towns, too. You can take campers to Fairfax for a burger or a movie at the Fairfax Theater.

Point Reyes Station is just fifteen minutes from Bear Valley. Get a tasty treat at the Bovine Bakery or a delicious sit down meal at the Station House Cafe.

A drive north along Route 1 will take you through Marshall to Tomales or further to Bodega Bay. A leisurely drive south will take you to Bolinas and Stinson Beach at the foot of Mt. Tam.

Beauty abounds in West Marin, so enjoy!



