

San Mateo County

AWESOME GETAWAYS

By Tom Stienstra
 Chronicle Staff Writer

A stellar coastal hike, the best bike ride in the Bay Area and access to miles of bay and ocean frontage make San Mateo County a recreation paradise for hikers, bikers and boaters.

The best hike is the climb to San Pedro Ridge and to the Montara Mountain Summit, the best bike ride is the 11-mile route on the Bay Ridge Trail from Highway 92 to Sneath Lane in San Bruno, and the best fishing and boating is from Pillar Point Harbor in Half Moon Bay and Coyote Point on the bay. These are among dozens of recreation highlights in San Mateo County.

The 23,000-acre Crystal Springs Watershed, even with limited access, sets the Peninsula apart from all other regions. There is no expansive swath of land and lakes like it in any other urban area in America.

Here are the top five getaways in San Mateo County, along with a selection of the best of the rest:

Best mountain climb

Montara Mountain, San Pedro Valley County Park, Pacifica

SYNOPSIS: 7-mile round trip, 1,800-foot climb, with panoramic coastal views on way up, then from summit, sweeping lookout across Pacific Ocean to the west and Sweeney Ridge and Crystal Springs Watershed to the east.

THE TRIP: At San Pedro Valley Park, look for the trailhead for the Montara Mountain Trail at the southwest end of the parking lot. The trek starts where you hike up through a eucalyptus forest and up to a prominent sub-ridge about 2 miles in. Just off the trail to the right, you will see a distinct rock outcrop. The lookout has spectacular views of the ocean and the local coast to San Francisco, Point Reyes, and out to sea, the Farallon Islands. From here, you continue up, where you reach a service road and cross into McNee Ranch State Park. Turn left and you climb, steeply at times, to the 1,898-

foot summit. You can stand on the summit peak (even though some radio towers are located on a nearby secondary peak adjacent to your position) and get one of California's best views.

THE VIEW: Looking to the north, and then turning in a circle, clockwise, you will see: San Francisco's Sutro Towers, Sweeney Ridge, Crystal Springs Watershed (look for the glimpse of Pillar Point Harbor, miles of ocean, and the coast extending to Marin and Mount Tamalpais.

HOW TO GET THERE: From San Francisco, take Interstate 280 to Daly City and the junction with Highway 1. Bear right on Highway 1 and continue through Pacifica to Linda Mar Boulevard. Turn left and drive until it

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dead-ends at Oddstad Boulevard. Turn right and drive about 50 yards to the park entrance on the left.

INFO: (650) 355-8289; www.eparks.net.

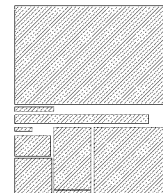
Best coastal getaway

Coastal Trail, Half Moon Bay and Pillar Point Harbor

SYNOPSIS: A gorgeous family-style coastal bike ride, beaches galore and a kayak ride in the harbor.

THE TRIP: The Coastal Trail extends 5 miles one way from Pillar Point Harbor south to the city of Half Moon Bay. This trip is easy and beautiful, with gorgeous views of the ocean and many spur trails providing access to Half Moon Bay State Beach. You can do a section of it on foot or the entire route on bike. On the north end is Pillar Point Harbor, where at water's edge you can rent open kayaks (all gear, \$15 per hour) and crown the outing at one of the seafood restaurants. At the south end is headquarters for Half Moon Bay State Beach, with a campground and access to miles of beach frontage.

HOW TO GET THERE: From San Francisco: Take Interstate 280 south to Daly City and Highway 1. Bear right (south) on Highway 1, drive through Pacifica, over Devil's Slide and continue 5 miles to Princeton (lighted intersection). Turn right and drive a short distance to Pillar Point Harbor on left. Turn left and park.



Kayak rentals on left; Coastal Trail on left near boat ramp.

From the Peninsula and East Bay: Take Highway 92 west into Half Moon Bay to the junction with Highway 1. Turn right (north) and drive 5 miles to Princeton (lighted intersection). Turn left and drive a short distance to Pillar Point Harbor on left. Turn left and park. Kayak rentals on the left; Coastal Trail on the left near boat ramp.

CONTACTS: Half Moon Bay State Beach, (650) 726-8820, www.parks.ca.gov; Pillar Point weather, (650) 726-6070; kayak rentals, (650) 773-6101; www.hmbkayak.com; bike rentals, The Bike Works, (650) 726-6708; general info: halfmoonbaychamber.org; www.coastsidelive.com.

Prettiest redwood park

Butano Redwoods State Park

SYNOPSIS: A gorgeous park that provides hiking trails through redwoods to ridgetop lookouts, a sensation mountain bike loop and pretty campsites.

THE TRIP: This is a Bay Area paradise for hiking, biking, camping and backpacking. The heart of the park is a deep redwood canyon. My favorite hike is the Mill Ox Loop, a 5-mile round trip that takes less than three hours, that provides both canyon views and a tour through dense forest. A great mountain bike ride is the 12-mile round trip on the Butano Fire Road, crowned by a lookout from an abandoned air strip. For camping, 21 drive-in sites are ideal for car camping and RVs. An additional 18 walk-in sites provide a bonus, where you walk 25 to 200 yards. Little known is Butano's backpack campground, the most hidden campground in the Bay Area. It takes a 5-mile hike with a 1,500-foot climb to reach seven pretty sites set in a forest, just below the west-facing Butano rim at 1,550 feet.

HOW TO GET THERE: From Half Moon Bay, drive south on Highway 1 for 17 miles to Pescadero Road. Turn left and drive past the town of Pescadero (about 3 miles) to Cloverdale Road. Turn right and drive 4.5 miles to the park entrance on the left. The Visitor Center is located just past the entrance station on the left.

CONTACT: Butano State Park, (650) 879-2040; Half Moon Bay District, (650) 726-8820; www.parks.ca.gov — then click on Find a Park.

Best bike trail

Bay Ridge Trail/Crystal Springs Watershed

SYNOPSIS: An 11-mile bike ride, one-way with a shuttle, from the Quarry

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Gate near Highway 92 and extending on the Bay Ridge Trail to Sweeney Ridge, and then beyond to Sneath Lane Gate in San Bruno.

THE TRIP: Crystal Springs is the 23,000-acre watershed on the Peninsula, owned and run by San Francisco PUC and Water Department. Though trips are limited to groups by reservation, riding the Ridge Trail (with a shuttle car at the end) is the best bike ride in the Bay Area. The trip starts with a rhythmic 640-foot pull to the Ridge Trail. You top out at Cahill Ridge, and continue north, in and out of forest, including some big firs and redwoods, and continue north from Five Points to Fifield Ridge. You emerge atop grasslands for stunning views to your left of the wild east flank of Montara Mountain. As you continue north, you then get views to your right of the South Bay. You emerge at Sweeney Ridge with a dramatic scope of Pacifica to your left, and to Peninsula wildlands and the South Bay to your right.

RESERVE A DATE: Reserve your trip for Wednesdays, Saturdays or Sundays at www.sfwater.org; automated help line at (650) 652-3203.

PARK SHUTTLE CAR: Take Interstate 280 to San Bruno and exit at Sneath Lane. Drive west on Sneath to the road's end. Leave your car near the access point for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

DRIVE TO TRAILHEAD: Return to I-280 and go south to Highway 92. Turn west on Highway 92, drive over Crystal Springs Reservoir and continue a half mile to the Quarry Gate on the right. Turn right and go a short distance to parking and trailhead.

MEET AT QUARRY GATE: Your group will meet the trail leader at the parking area.

FACILITIES: No water. Bring your own, at least two quarts. Chemical toilets available.

INFO: www.sfwater.org or (650) 652-3203.

Best fishing

Deep sea fishing/Pillar Point Harbor

SYNOPSIS: Rockfish, cabezon and lingcod are eager to bite at inshore reefs.

THE TRIP: Now is the time to fill your

