





# Pillar Point Bluff Self-guided Tour

Pillar Point Bluff offers hikers, joggers, bicyclists, and dog-walkers a chance to take in the breathtaking sights and sounds of the Pacific Ocean. The 220-acre bluff top includes a section of the California Coastal Trail and offers views of Pillar Point Harbor, agricultural lands and the world famous Mavericks surf break. **Start your tour at the Main Parking Lot off of Airport St.**

## Self-guided Tour Routes (Approximate Time):

-  Pillar Point Bluff Trail to Jean Lauer Trail to Pillar Point Bluff Trail – 1.3 miles (1 hour)
-  Pillar Point Bluff Tr to Jean Lauer Tr to Ross's Cove Tr to Jean Lauer Tr to Frenchman's Reef Tr to Pillar Point Bluff Tr – 2.5 miles (2 hours)



## A. Pillar Point Marsh:

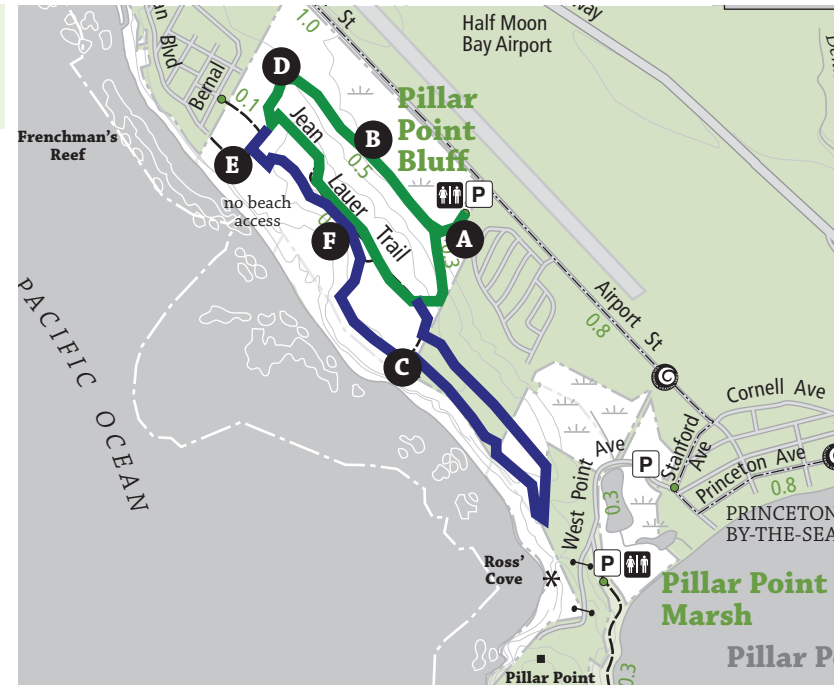
Pillar Point Marsh is a protected area for the salt marsh habitat at Pillar Point Harbor. Salt marshes are coastal wetlands that are flooded and drained by salt water brought in by the tides. The marsh soil is composed of deep mud and peat. Peat is made up of decomposing plant material and has a spongy texture. Because salt marshes are submerged by tides and have decomposing plant material, oxygen levels can become very low, a condition called hypoxia. Hypoxia is caused by the growth of bacteria which produce the sulfurous rotten

egg smell. Because of the bacteria salt marshes are excellent habitat for invertebrates, fish, birds, and many more species! Salt marshes also serve as a buffer from wave energy, reducing shoreline erosion and trapping sediments.



## B: Raptors along Airport Street:

The Half Moon Bay Airport was built for the U.S. Army in 1942 as an auxiliary airfield for Salinas Army Air Base. It is now operated as a public airport used mainly by individuals and for emergency services. The airport also provides excellent viewing of raptor species hunting! Northern Harriers (left) are often seen flying low over the scrub and marsh habitat, identifiable by their flat profiled face and white feathered rump. Red-tailed Hawks (middle), American Kestrels, and Red-shouldered Hawks are often seen perching on fence posts along Airport Street or soaring high in search of prey. White-tailed Kites (right) were given an excellent name as they hover in spot while scanning the ground below.



## C: The "Golf Ball":

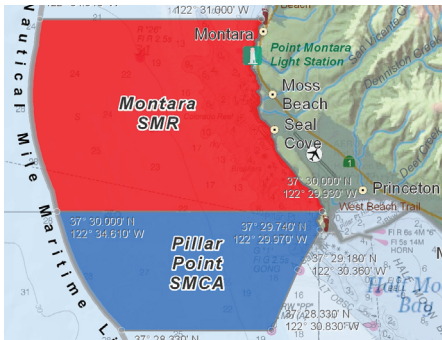
From here you can see the telemetry antenna covered by a hard, white plastic shell at the Pillar Point Air Force Station. This station tracks the flight accuracy of missiles, especially those launched from the Vandenberg Air Force base near Santa Maria in Southern California. If something goes wrong with the missile launch, Command Control at Pillar Point sends the signal to blow up the missile. The station also sends up engines for satellites and moves satellite positions.





### D: History:

This area was originally inhabited by Native Americans called the Ohlone, who made use of the area's rich resources. Gaspar de Portola's expedition of 1769 passed by this area on its way north to "Discover the Bay". A number of shipwrecks occurred in this area during the early 19th century. Remains from the Rydal Hall shipwreck are on display at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Visitor Center. The bluff property itself was historically used for grazing. When San Mateo County adopted the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Master Plan in 2004 it identified these lands for acquisition. Peninsula Open Space Trust subsequently secured the parcels in the area and made initial public access improvements including building a parking lot, restroom, and the Jean Lauer Trail. San Mateo County Parks acquired Pillar Point Bluff with a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board as an addition to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in 2011.



### E: Marine Protected Area:

The beach below Pillar Point Bluff is part of the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. This area and stretching out 3 miles into the ocean is part of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) called the Montara State Marine Reserve. This MPA has the highest levels of protections and was created to preserve the abundance of spectacular sea-life present in this area. As such, while dogs are permitted on leash on the bluff-top, they are not allowed on the beach below.

### F: Coastal Scrub Habitat:

Referred to as a "soft" chaparral habitat, coastal scrub is made up of low-growing and drought-resistant shrubs. Common plants in this habitat are the California Sagebrush, Toyon, Coffeeberry, monkeyflowers, manzanita, and Coyote Brush. Pillar Point Bluff has several common non-native plants thrown into this mix as well, including Pampass Grass, Monterey Pines, Oxalis (Sourgrass) and wild mustard. A majority of the plants here bloom in the spring or summer. Common animals in this habitat are California Towhees, Cottontail Rabbits, Deer, Quail, Pocket Gophers, Hummingbirds, Coyotes and Skunks.



**Gray whales can be seen from this trail in the spring while humpback whales are typically seen in the summer and fall.**

**When you're done with your tour, please return this guide to the kiosk for the next visitor.** If you find this guide, please return it to: Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, 200 Nevada Ave, Moss Beach, CA

Pillar Point Bluff is a part of **San Mateo County Parks**, which manages parks, preserves, trails, and historic sites throughout the county to preserve public lands and provide opportunities for education and recreation.

For more information, visit [www.SMCoParks.org](http://www.SMCoParks.org).

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