

The ULTIMATE Trail Mix

Set your course and feast your eyes on the beauty of the Monterey Peninsula

By Tom Bentley

Soberanes Canyon Trail

DAVID GUBERNICK



Carmel Valley

FRANK BALTHIS

Those who want to hike in the Monterey Bay area must make a difficult decision. It's not the hiking itself that's difficult; it's the profusion of delightful and even dazzling trails that hikers will want to trek. Fear not. The following is a tasty representative sampling, from the sweet stroll to the acerbic ascent.

Starting with beyond-eye-candy beautiful, **POINT LOBOS STATE NATURAL RESERVE** is a place where the simple elements of tree, rock, and water converge into extraordinary sights. The entire reserve exemplifies a bay hiker's buffet, yielding wandering walks everywhere. One that's worth the entrance fee alone is the North Shore Trail, which begins off the parking lot at Whalers Cove. The cove itself is captivating, the home of a 19th century whaling station and other historic buildings. The rich, layered blues of the cove are entrancing above water, but hikers often see scuba divers delighting in submarine sights of fish and foliage.

The North Shore is a headlands-hugging trail of modest ascents and descents and immodest vistas of sheer granite cliffs and brilliantly blue coves. A short trail branches off the main path that provides a big-eye view of Guillelot Island and its nesting seabirds. Upon reaching the Seal Point parking lot, hikers tend to turn around and go back. Depending on how many times one stops to gasp, it should take between one and two hours to travel the three-mile distance.

There's not much physical distance between Point Lobos and Carmel Valley, but the difference in terrain, trees, and the even the air makes it seem like a world away. At **GARLAND RANCH REGIONAL PARK**, about eight miles off the coast down Carmel Valley Road, hikers can experience variations simply by choosing a different trail. Trekkers can take a leisurely stroll along the Carmel River and rippling ponds or head up to the highlands for vibrant valley vistas. One of the trails that give a taste of all elements is the Garzas Canyon-Redwood Canyon loop that, in its 3.6 miles, provides pleasant oak-hosted creek crossings over wooden footbridges up to greener-than-green fern forests and whopping redwoods. Hikers breathe a bit heavier on the ascents than on the Point Lobos jaunt, but nothing requires extra air. Be sure to check out a park map; loop turns are marked but can be a bit obscure.

The outdoor enthusiast who likes an appetizer hike before the main course should consider **GARRAPATA STATE PARK**, about 10 miles south of Carmel. On the ocean side, take one of the bluff trails, which go from roadside parking to small cliff-crossing paths through ice plant meadows. The summit reveals a variety of inspired views of white-sand beaches and rocky tide pools below, and one of the trails leads down to the beach. Enter the state park, left pass the old barn, and cruise a bit to the marked fork. To add some altitude to the views, take the left fork, which leads up to Rocky Ridge Peak. It is worth the climb; lovely meadows and rich ocean views open up at the top. The six-mile loop leads back, steeply, through Soberanes Canyon, with its many creek crossings, cool redwood groves, and cactus-covered cliffs.

Big Sur offers state parks galore, with sensational views and seaside waterfalls. A lesser-known treat is **PARTINGTON COVE**, around six miles south of the Nepenthe complex. A steep but quick walk from the roadside parking above offers two scenic beach choices: over Partington Creek or through a historic tunnel to the gleaming narrow cove, with the remnants of an old ship landing on the sharp cliff. Head back over the creek and go left down to the beach below, where admirers of toppling towers stack the smaller of the many granite boulders. The half-mile back up to the car is steep but short.

Remember to take a beverage, sunblock, and snacks; the main meal and dessert are a matter of course.

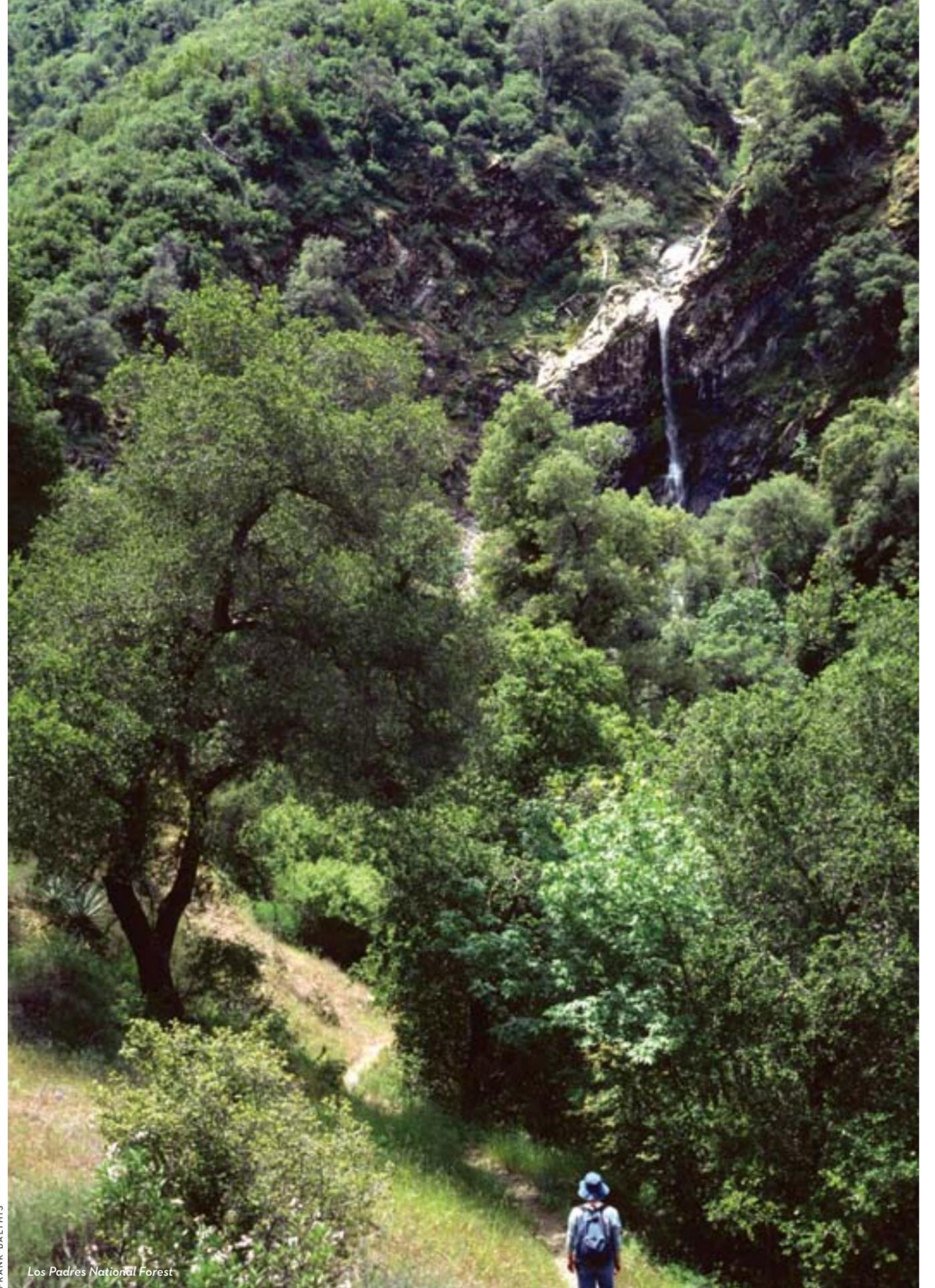
Download a Trail Map

POINT LOBOS STATE NATURAL RESERVE
www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=571

GARLAND RANCH REGIONAL PARK
www.mprpd.org/index.cfm/id/19/Garland-Ranch-Regional-Park/

GARRAPATA STATE PARK
www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=579

PARTINGTON COVE, BIG SUR
www.hikespeak.com/trails/partington-cove-big-sur/



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