

San Gregorio State Beach

The area includes a protected, driftwood-strewn estuary at the back of a wide, sandy beach, with grassy bluffs along the coast. The estuary is home to many birds and small animals.

California Historical Landmark 26 commemorates the passage of Spanish Explorer Captain Gaspar de Portolá through this area in October 1769. Rancho San Gregorio, consisting of 17,752 acres, was granted to Antonio Buelna in 1839. The rancho extended from Tunitas Creek in the north to the mouth of Pomponio Creek and encompassed the whole of the lower San Gregorio watershed.



Telephone: 650-879-2170

Operating hours: Day-use area, 8:00-sunset.

Location/Directions: Off Highway 1, 10.5 miles south of Half Moon Bay, just south of the junction with Highway 84.

Facilities

Fee charged for day-use parking.

Chemical toilets. Picnic tables and barbecue grills.

Designated handicapped parking spots.

Dogs prohibited on the beach. Dogs on leash allowed on the trails and in the parking and picnic areas.

Features

San Gregorio State Beach has some rather steep and very high (60 m., 190 ft.) coastal bluffs and cliffs bordering the ocean. Except for the wide area at the mouth of San Gregorio Creek, the beach tends to be quite narrow; in some places during the winter, it is entirely inundated at high tide. In the summer, a sandy beach is present from San Gregorio to Pomponio State Beach. A sand bar builds up at the mouth of San Gregorio Creek and remains until fall and winter rains are sufficient to break through. A small freshwater marsh is located at the mouth of the creek.

Flora diversity is slightly greater than in many of the other San Mateo Coast units, due to the diverse topography and the riparian corridor along San Gregorio Creek. Five native plant communities are represented; they include riparian, coastal strand, northern coastal scrub, annual grassland, and freshwater marsh.

The coastal strand community, consisting of beach and dune vegetation, is limited to a few small areas near the mouth of San Gregorio Creek and the upper portions of the beach, where spring high tides wash up against the coastal bluffs. Vegetation consists almost entirely of annual and perennial herbaceous plants. Sea rocket, beach bur, mustard (*Brassica* sp.), and several annual grasses are common.

Coastal scrub is the predominant vegetation in the unit. It occupies the terrace between Highway 1 and the bluffs, and is also found on all upland ridges of the inland portion east of the highway. Common shrubs include, coyote brush, bush lupine, California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), and lizard tail. One rare plant is found there—the Salt Marsh Milk Vetch (*Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *pycnostachyus*) (see picture).



Pomponio State Beach

This area provides access to miles of gently sloping, sandy beaches at the base of high sandstone bluffs. This day-use facility features a small lagoon, roaring surf, a wide parking area, picnic tables, and barbecues.



The creek and park were named for an Indian, from the Yokut-speaking people in the San Joaquin Valley, who was given the name Pomponio when he was an *alcalde* at Mission Santa Clara. He became a resistance fighter against the mission system and had a mountain hideout at the headwaters of Pomponio Creek.

Pomponio and other Indians from the missions engaged in a lucrative trade in captured mission horses, which were run by the Yokuts to the Paiute and Shoshone people in northern Nevada, who in turn traded them to the interior mountain tribes and on into Crow, Blackfoot, and Sioux country. Pomponio was captured and slain by the Spaniards in 1824.

Telephone: 650-879-2170

Operating hours: Day-use area, 8:00-sunset.

Location/Directions: Off Highway 1, 12 miles south of Half Moon Bay.

Facilities

Fee charged for day-use parking.

Chemical toilets. Picnic tables and barbecue grills.

Designated handicapped parking spots.

Dogs prohibited on the beach.

Features

Pomponio State Beach has some rather steep and very high (60 m., 190 ft.) coastal bluffs and cliffs bordering the ocean. The sand beaches tend to be wider than those at San Gregorio, but are mostly quite narrow, and in some places, are inundated at high tide. The largest beaches occur at the mouth of Pomponio Creek, Long Gulch, and Dairy Gulch. The latter two gulches are small drainages and normally carry water only in the winter.

In the picture, a snowy egret fishes at the mouth of Pomponio Creek when the creek is blocked by sand during the dry summer months.

The coastal strand community is limited to a small dune area west of the parking area, near the mouth of Pomponio Creek. There is also a pristine coastal scrub community west of Highway 1 along the trail north of the parking lot. The major riparian community at Pomponio Beach occurs along Pomponio Creek, east of Highway 1. The most inland portion features a riparian forest of willows (*Salix lasiolepis* and *S. saliana*). A small marsh community occurs near the mouth of Pomponio Creek, west of the highway.

Most of the inland portion of Pomponio State Beach east of the highway is grassland, including a large stand of native bunchgrass.

