



Fitzgerald Marine Reserve Self-guided Tour

Fitzgerald is within Montara State Marine Reserve, a Marine Protected Area. Please enjoy our beautiful tide pools and the creatures living in them by simply observing them. Never touch or pick up marine animals, plants, rocks, or shells. Stay at least 300 feet from all marine mammals, including harbor seals, for your safety and theirs. **Start your tour at the edge of the parking lot and follow the informative displays down the ramp to the beach.**

1 Waves and tides

Watch the waves – is the water coming closer or moving away? If the waves are coming gradually closer, the tide is coming in. If the waves are moving away from you, the tide is going out.

Whether the tide is high or low depends on the moon. The moon's gravitational pull causes a bulge of water on one side of the Earth. Each day there are two low tides and two high tides.

2 The Seal Cove Fault

Once you're on the beach, walk to the right to see a great example of California geology. The Seal Cove Fault line is a ridge that runs along the reef and continues out towards Point Reyes, in an area called the syncline.



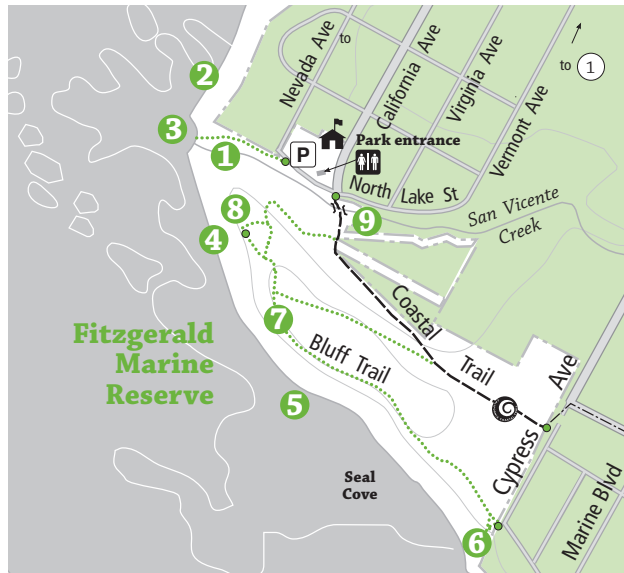
Take a few minutes to look at the rocks here. They provide a geological record of fossils that date back to the Miocene epoch, more than 5.3 million years ago. See if you can find fossils of sea creatures in the rocks.



Hermit Crab



Chiton



3 Tidepools

If you can safely walk out to the reef, stand next to a tidepool and observe it quietly. The longer you look, the more you will see. You may see some of the creatures shown here.

Watch for the slow-moving sea stars as they envelop their prey. Look for small camouflaged fish called sculpins; they typically hide in the pools and dart about quickly.



Giant green anemone



Ochre sea star



Bat star

4 Harbor seals

This is a good viewing spot for the resident harbor seals. The local population includes as many as 350 seals. At low tides, the seals typically rest on the rocks across the lagoon from the beach. Look carefully – they are well camouflaged. As you watch the seals, listen for their vocalizations.



If the beach is open, continue to stop 5. Depending on the tide, the beach may be closed to protect the seals. If you see orange cones, the beach is closed; please do not cross any cones. **Do not** continue – turn around, retrace your steps to the parking lot, and continue the tour backwards from stop 9 to stop 5. From there, you can either retrace your steps to the parking lot or return on the trail.





Purple sea urchin



Giant sunflower star

5 Surfgrass flats

This is Cypress Point. Very low tides reveal the surfgrass flats. Marine life found in the surfgrass flats can be different than life found by the ramp. Here you might see moonglow anemones, purple sea urchins, kelp crabs, gumboot chitons, giant sunflower stars, and sea lettuce. Watch for the slow-moving



Moonglow anemone



Gumboot chiton

sea stars and chiton. Also, look very closely for the small nudibranchs, which look like elegant underwater slugs.

This is also a good place to listen and look for shorebirds. Fitzgerald has many bird species; the most common include the Brown Pelican, Western Gull, California Gull, Great Blue Heron, Black Oystercatcher, and cormorants. Look out in the open water to see cormorants diving into the water for food, then popping up to the surface.



Black Oystercatcher

6 Historical remnant

Once you reach the stairs, look for a large unnatural object in the ocean. This historical relic dates back to World War II. A flag was placed atop the cement to warn ships from getting too close. For more historical information, read the panels on the first platform of the Seal Cove staircase as you climb to your next stop.

7 Cypress grove

You are now walking in a Monterey Cypress forest. These trees were planted here more than a century ago. As you walk through the forest, you may notice something orange on the limbs of some trees. This is a type of green algae in the genus *Trentepohlia*. This species of algae is rich in carotene, which is the same pigment that makes carrots orange.



Algae on cypress

This beautiful area, sometimes called The Enchanted Forest, was the setting for the opening scenes of the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

8 Views from Strawberry Hill

This stop offers great views of the whole intertidal ecosystem. In winter and spring, you might see whale spouts from here. Behind you is Strawberry Hill, named for the wild strawberries that cover the bluff. Please do not pick any – they are an important food source for the animals of Fitzgerald and, like all plants and animals in the park, are protected.



9 Birding the creek



Red-tailed Hawk

Pause near the bridge here and look out into the San Vicente Creek channel. Red-tailed Hawks are common around the creek and bridge. You may also hear and see some of Fitzgerald's many resident and migratory songbird species.

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 Avenue, Moss Beach, CA 94038.

Don't miss the Fitzgerald Visitor's Center, where you can learn even more about this special place.

Fitzgerald is within **Montara State Marine Reserve**, a Marine Protected Area managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Visit www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/mpa for more information.

James V. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is 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.

San Mateo County Parks
Wild places & friendly spaces