

Adam Blauert: Marin County a nice surprise

I'm thankful for all the recent snow and rain that we've had.

All the same, I've been itching to get up into the high country. With late opening dates projected for the Sierra highways and heavy snow that will remain on many meadows and lakes for weeks to come, I've been forced to discover new recreation areas.

It's been a blessing in disguise and this week I want to share three magnificent easy hikes from my recent trip to Marin County. If you can't automatically place that on your mental map, just imagine the region that starts where the northern end of the Golden Gate Bridge hits solid ground.



Merced Sun-Star - Adam Blauert, outdoor columnist

The coastline is rugged and wind-swept, while the inland areas have more peaceful weather. The whole region is lush and green. The area's legendary leftist politics may or may not be to your taste, but the quality of the recreation areas is not contested.

Less urbanized than other parts of the Bay Area, it contains many national and state parklands. It's also a mecca for bikers. Watch out for them on the narrow roads -- they're everywhere!

Marin County is a nice place to visit in the spring when wildflowers abound.

It's also nice in the summer when ocean winds and breezes keep it quite a bit cooler than our San Joaquin Valley.

During my weekend trip, I hiked three short but spectacular trails. All three are perfect for anyone who felt like trying out a hike after reading my last two columns.

Point Bonita

Closest to home is the trail to the Point Bonita Lighthouse.

Perched on a rock guarding the gateway to the Bay, the beacon occupies a breathtaking spot. The round trip hike is only one mile, but in that short distance you hike among wildflowers, through a narrow tunnel and across a suspension bridge.

The trail is open 10:30-3:30 on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

You can see much of San Francisco from the lighthouse.

To get to Point Bonita, turn off on the first possible exit after crossing the Golden Gate Bridge and follow the signs. Nearby are many former military installations, including the concrete bunkers of Battery Mendell. If you like exploring ghost towns and historic ruins, you'll enjoy this stop. It's just slightly further down the road beyond the trailhead to Point Bonita.

If you have time, explore the nearby roads.

There's a lot to do and see.

Mt. Tamalpais

A few miles to the north, a hike of less than a mile will take you to the top of Mt. Tamalpais.

At 2,571 feet, this is one of the highest summits in the Bay Area. From the top you can see the Bay and many of its communities.

You also have a stunning view of the Pacific Ocean. It's a bit of a climb, but it doesn't take too long before you're at the top. The trail starts out paved with railroad ties, but becomes rocky near the summit.

To get to the trailhead, drive Highway 1 northwest from Marin City and turn north (right) on the Panoramic Highway. Turn north (right) on East Ridgecrest Boulevard, which will take you straight to the trailhead parking. You can also stop at Muir Woods along the way and hike a justifiably popular redwood grove.

Point Reyes Tule Elk

My third hike took me to the northern end of Point Reyes.

Separated from the mainland and the North American Plate by the San Andreas Fault, the Point Reyes Peninsula is part of the Pacific Plate. It moves northward at the rate of two inches a year and was once part of the Tehachapi Range in Southern California!

Geologic forces have created a dramatic landscape that is crisscrossed by miles and miles of trails. To find Point Reyes, watch for the turn off along Highway 1 in Olema.

The hike to the Point Reyes Lighthouse is one of my favorites, but this time I tried the Tomales Point Trail. If you hike the whole six miles you can reach the northernmost end of the peninsula.

If you just want to see the magnificent herd of Tule elk, you might not even have to walk a mile. We saw dozens of them near the trailhead. I've seen elk in several parts of California, but this is the best nearby herd after the one at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge near Los Banos.

Adam Blauert is an avid outdoorsman and local historian who enjoys fishing, backpacking and exploring the western states. He can be reached at adamblauert@yahoo.com

- [Outdoors: Point Bonita](#)
- **If you go**

POINT BONITA: www.nps.gov; (415) 331-1540

BATTERY MENDELL: www.militarymuseum.org

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA: www.nps.gov; (415) 561-4700

MT. TAMALPAIS STATE PARK: www.mttam.net or www.parks.ca.gov

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE: www.nps.gov; (415) 464-5100