

BEAR VALLEY TRAIL TO COAST TRAIL, POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE, CA

This 8.4-mile out-and-back hike starts at the Bear Valley Visitor Center and follows Bear Valley out to the coast. Along the way, it passes Divide Meadow. This is one of the few trails in Point Reyes where bicycles are allowed, and one can bicycle from the Bear Valley trailhead to the junction with the Glen and Baldy Trails. Arch Rock used to be located at the coast near the end of the Bear Valley Trail, but unfortunately it collapsed in 2015. So, we hiked a short distance north on the Coast Trail, to get views looking northwest towards Limantour Beach, the impressive white cliffs above Drakes Beach, and Chimney Rock. I recommend picking up a hiking map from the Bear Valley Visitor Center (a PDF is also available on the NPS website).

The distances for this hike are as follows:

Bear Valley Visitors Center to Divide Meadow: 1.6 miles

Divide Meadow to junction with Glen and Baldy Trails: 1.5 miles

Junction with Glen and Baldy Trails to junction with Coast Trail: 0.9 mile

Junction with Coast Trail to start of views looking northwest: 0.2 mile

Return hike along this same route: 4.2 miles

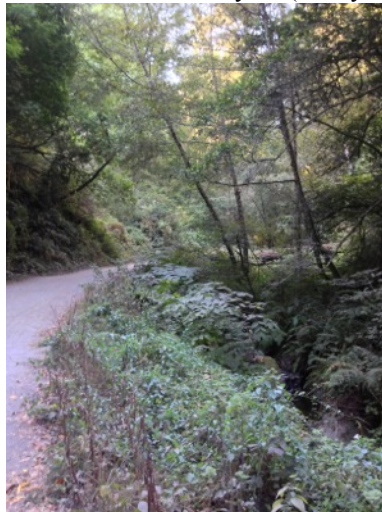
The day started out wonderfully sunny, which was a nice change from our previous hikes in the fog:



The Bear Valley Trail is quite scenic, and it follows an old road up to Divide Meadow:



The road follows a stream up to the meadow, and crosses it occasionally on (barely noticeable) bridges:



Up ahead is where the Meadow Trail joins the main Bear Valley Trail:



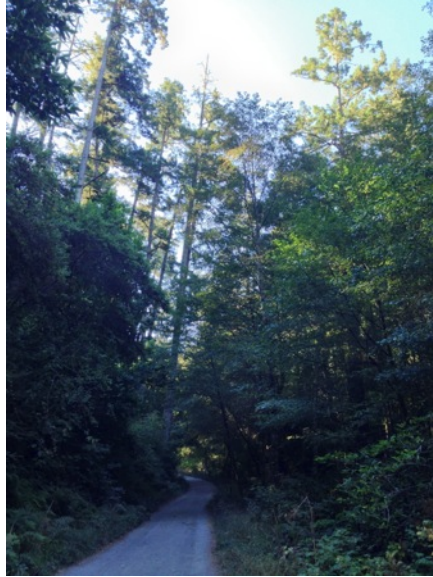
The Bear Valley Trail is generally relatively flat, but it does have a few steeper stretches:



These plants near the trail had some small berries on them; I'm not sure what the name of this plant is:



Continuing up this scenic trail towards Divide Meadow:



The sun shining through the trees made for nice HDR photography:



Divide Meadow is just beyond the tall trees seen in the background center of this photo:



At the start of the meadow is where the Old Pine Trail joins the Bear Valley Trail. When we did this hike (mid-September, 2018), there was a sign at the beginning of this trail warning hikers of an active yellow-jacket nest in the area:



Once the trail reaches the start of the meadow, it descends through the meadow and eventually leads to the ocean:



Looking across at the only patch of green visible in this meadow in late summer:



Looking back towards the "top" of the meadow:



Here is a closer look at the nice greenery in Divide Meadow; the rest of the meadow was quite dry at this time of the year:

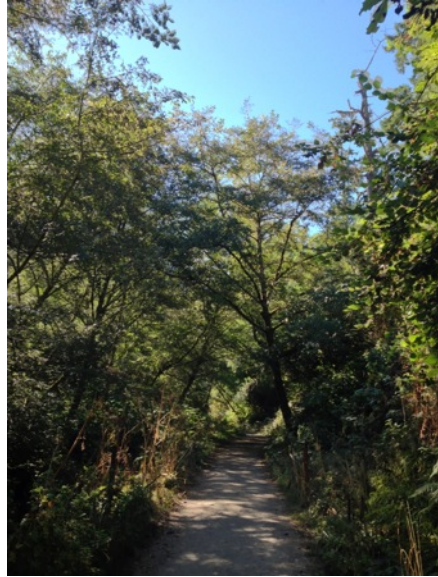


The trail then gently descends towards the junction with the Glen and Baldy Trails:



The next seven photos show our progress along the section of the Bear Valley Trail between Divide Meadow and the junction with the Glen and Baldy Trails:





Here we have reached the trail junction, where bicycles must stop. The Glen Trail branches off to the south:



This is the view back up the Bear Valley Trail, which gets narrower as it approaches this junction:



Here is the trail sign, telling hikers that it is 0.9 mile to the Coast Trail along the Bear Valley Trail, 1.5 miles back to Divide Meadow, and 3.1 miles back to the Bear Valley Trailhead. Along the Glen Trail, it is 1.5 miles to Glen Campground and 3.1 miles to Wildcat Campground (both of these camping areas must be reached by hiking, i.e. visitors cannot drive to them):



To the left is the Bear Valley Trail, continuing on to the coast, and to the right is the Baldy Trail. Note that the Baldy Trail is generally overgrown, and sometimes also has an "active yellow-jacket nest" warning:



The greenery seems to be denser on this later part of the Bear Valley Trail:



Notice the wall of ferns on the south side of the creek through here:



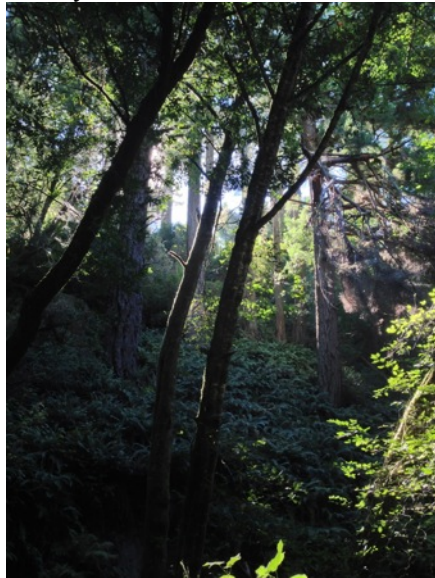
The trees arched above the trail in some places, creating a sort of tunnel to walk through:



More impressive ferns above the creek:



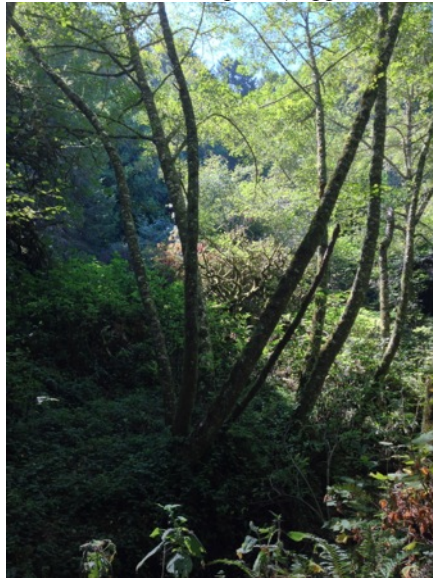
Looking across the creek at some tall trees on a nearby hillside:



The next five photos show our progress along the Bear Valley Trail towards the coast:



This branches of this tree across the creek (seen in the center of the photo) appear to have been entirely covered by moss:



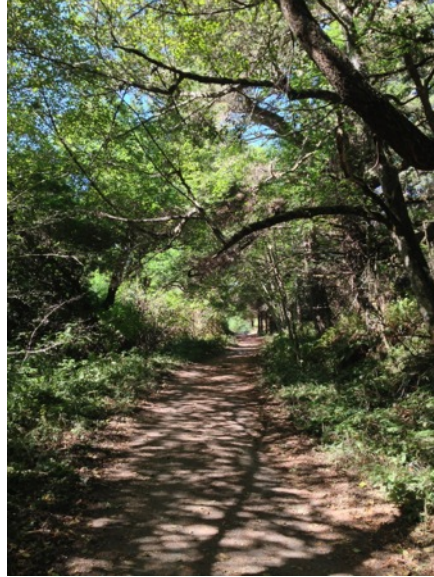
This was a particularly scenic spot to take an HDR photo of the trees and shrubbery, with the blue sky visible through the branches:



Notice there are still many ferns growing alongside the creek here:



We are now starting to leave the dense trees and ferns near the creek and approach a different kind of greenery near the coast:



The forest opens up here, and we were able to get some views of the surrounding hills:



Here is the hillside to the south, which the Glen Trail and the Coast Trail ascend:



Here is the hillside to the north; I think the Sky Trail descends the ridge in the background and eventually meets the Coast Trail:



There were many of these pretty pink flowers alongside the trail (I am not sure what they are called):



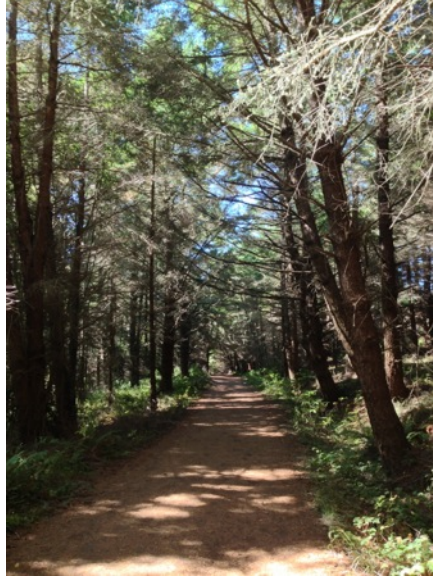
The trail enters a different kind of forest, with relatively small trees, mostly Douglas Fir:



The trail was very comfortable to walk on here, due to the thick layer of fir needles:



Continuing along this very nice stretch of trail through the fir trees:



Here we see that we will soon leave this patch of fir trees and approach the coast:



This is where the Bear Valley Trail joins the Coast Trail. From here, it is 3.5 miles south along this trail to the Wildcat Campground, and 4.1 miles north to the Coast Campground. Also, the junction with the Sky Trail is 0.5 miles to the north:



We decided to take the right (northwest) fork:



The left (southwest) fork descends briefly, meets with the old trail to Arch Rock, then ascends the hillside to the south before following the coast again:



There is an interesting cliff face on the hillside to the north, which looks like a sort of grey limestone, but I am not sure of the kind of rock found in this area:



After walking a short distance along the Coast Trail, we got our first view of the ocean:



Looking across at a better view of the hillside to the south:



The Coast Trail goes through some shrubbery (it appears to be mostly greasewood):



Looking southwest, we could see the other fork of the Coast Trail (left) and the old trail to Arch Rock (right), which is now blocked off by logs:



The trail soon turns to the north, and we lose sight of the ocean as we are hiking through tall shrubbery:



At one point along the trail, there is what appears to be a use trail heading towards the cliffs above the ocean. Since it appeared to go through some thorny plants as well as poison oak, we decided not to check it out:



The Coast Trail continues north from here, through an open area with no shade. We decided to turn around at this point, since we did not have time for a longer hike on this day:



There are excellent views looking north towards Drakes Beach and Chimney Rock from here. I was disappointed to only have brought my iPhone for a camera, since a good zoom lens would have been nice to have here:



Panorama looking west and north:



Panorama looking south and west:



On the hillside above the trail, we spotted these interesting flowering plants with fluffy white tops:



One last view looking north along the Coast Trail before turning around:



Here is another view of the hillside which the Glen Trail and the Coast Trail ascend:



Looking towards where the Bear Valley Trail goes, up the valley and to Divide Meadow:



Here we are back at the junction of the Coast Trail with the Bear Valley Trail:



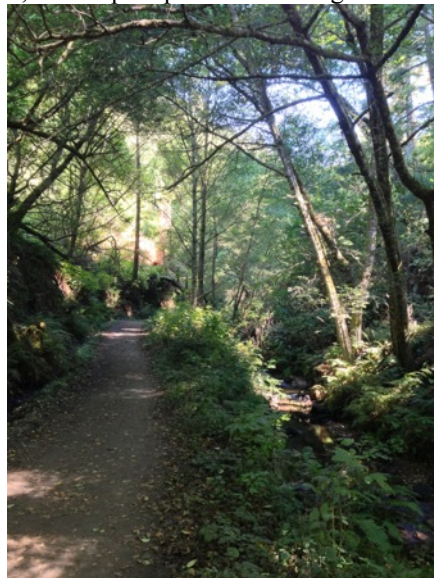
This spot is alongside the Bear Valley Trail on the way back to its junction with the Glen and Baldy Trails. The ferns overhanging the rocky cliff reminded me of photos I've seen of ferns on ancient ruins in South America:



This is certainly a very scenic part of the trail:



The trail follows the creek very closely in places, and is quite pleasant walking:



There are very few places to sit for a second breakfast or lunch alongside the Bear Valley or Coast Trails; this is one of them:



Here is another location where ferns are growing in great abundance above the creek which runs alongside the trail:



This is certainly a very pleasant place to walk and enjoy the scenery of the forest:



This gnarled tree is located alongside the Bear Valley Trail between its junction with the Glen and Baldy Trails and Divide Meadow. It seems to be a popular photography spot for tourists:



Here we have arrived at the lower (western) end of Divide Meadow:



There are more of the pink flowers (which I had also photographed near the coast) alongside the trail at Divide Meadow:



Upon arriving back at the Bear Valley parking area, we heard a loud crash, which was surprisingly reminiscent of the sound of ice breaking off of a glacier at Lake Louise. It turned out to be a large branch breaking off the big oak tree near the start of the Miwok Village trail. This is a good reminder for hikers to be aware of their surroundings, and fortunately no hikers were underneath the branch when it fell:

