

BEAR VALLEY TRAIL–MT. WITTENBURG TRAIL–Z-RANCH TRAIL–SKY TRAIL–MEADOW TRAIL LOOP
POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE, CA

This 6.5-mile loop trail starts at the Bear Valley Visitor Center, ascends to the ridge between Bear Valley and the coast, then loops around to Sky Camp. We had much thicker fog than on our hike the previous week, so we did not get any views looking down towards the seashore. See my report on the Bear Valley–Mt. Wittenburg–Meadow Trail loop for more photos and details on those trails. 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 Mt. Wittenburg Trail turnoff: 0.2 mile

Mt. Wittenburg Trail turnoff to junction with Z-Ranch Trail: 1.8 miles

Junction with Z-Ranch Trail to junction with Horse Trail: 0.7 mile

Junction with Horse Trail to junction with Sky Trail: 0.4 mile

Junction with Sky Trail to Sky Camp: 0.5 mile

Sky Camp to junction with Meadow Trail: 0.5 mile

Junction with Meadow Trail to Bear Valley Trail via Meadow Trail: 1.6 miles

Bear Valley Trail–Meadow Trail junction to Bear Valley Visitors Center: 0.8 mile

Our hike up the Mt. Wittenburg Trail was much foggier than our hike up this same trail a week earlier:



Here we are heading north along the Z-Ranch Trail from its junction with the Mt. Wittenburg Trail:



Notice how the fog is preventing us from seeing very far along the ridge:



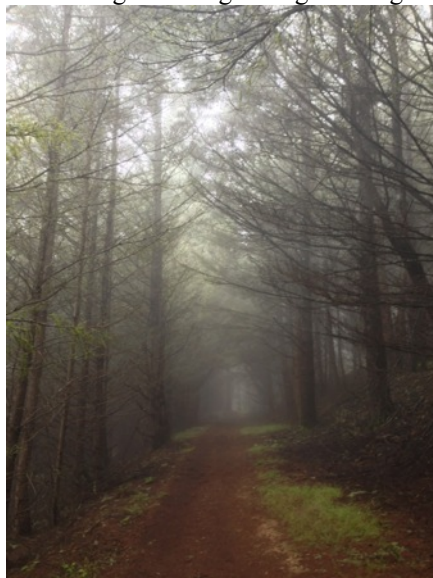
Hiking along the first stretch of this trail was rather eerie in this thick fog, as we couldn't see the trail far ahead:



This is probably sap oozing out of this tree, but I'm not sure why:



Near a high point on the trail, we encountered some sunlight shining through the fog:



But as we started to descend again, the fog grew thicker:



Looking at some grass growing among the trees, which is surprisingly green for August, but it's getting enough moisture with this fog:



The green grass turns abruptly to yellow at the edge of this clearing:



The grass alongside the trail is very thick in some places:



The trail begins to wind downwards, and sometimes we can see further than others:



In some places, the fog is still quite thick:



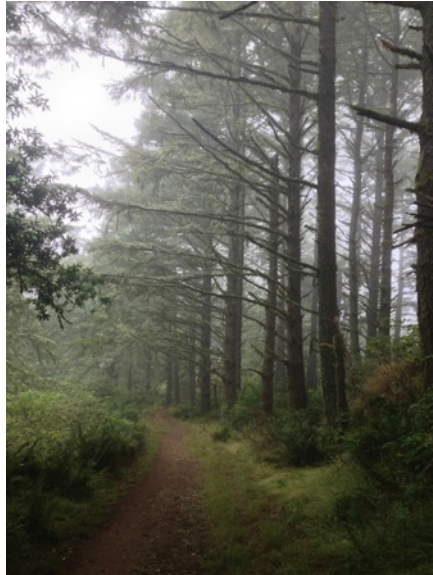
This small tree/branch is almost entirely encased in moss:



Here the trail begins to descend more steeply, and we are starting to wonder how much more it will descend before joining the Sky Trail:



Notice how the trees to the right of the trail here have grown in almost a straight line:



Since we've descended some distance, the fog is less thick:



Up ahead, we finally can see where the Z-Ranch Trail meets the Horse Trail, which comes up from Bear Valley:



Bear Valley is 3 miles down the Horse Trail:



Looking down the Horse Trail (which I think is one of the few trails in this area open to horses on weekends):



From here, we began to follow the trail towards the Sky Trail:



The forest thins slightly near the beginning of the trail, and we start to encounter more sunlight than we've seen so far in this hike:



The trail passes by a wall of berry bushes on the left:



Looking up the hillside, towards where we had just descended along the Z-Ranch Trail (if you look at the park map, you'll see that the trail we're following here goes right below the Z-Ranch Trail for a short distance):



We begin to approach a nice clearing, filled with smaller plants:



Looking across this clearing, towards where the thicker fog is coming across a ridge towards us from the ocean side of the hills:



Panorama of the trail going through this clearing:



One more photo of this clearing, from the other side:



Looking down the valley this trail cuts above; on a clear day, there probably is an excellent view from here:



Notice the vines climbing up this tree to the right of the trail here:



Around another corner, the trail begins to descend again for a short distance:



The moss on this huckleberry bush is quite impressive:



Up ahead is the junction with the Sky Trail:



It's only 0.8 mile from here to a parking area along the road to Limantour Beach, by following the Sky Trail in the opposite direction, but I don't recall there being much parking there:



The fog was incredibly thick along the Sky Trail:



The fog definitely seemed to be thicker on this side of the ridge:



It was nice to follow a gently climbing gravel road for a short distance, to Sky Camp (the road is probably used by park officials to service the camping area):



Most of the campsites at Sky Camp are a ways off the main trail:



Looking through the fog along the trail towards the campsites:



There is a picnic table alongside the trail here, which is a great place to stop for lunch (though it was very wet due to the fog on this day). Note that there aren't many good places to sit and eat lunch along this route:



Looking over towards the first campsite at Sky Camp; I'm guessing there would be a very good view looking towards the ocean from here on a clear day:



Just past the camp, the trail narrows and gains elevation quickly:



We enter the fog again as we ascend towards the ridge:



We also began to notice an increasing quantity of very nice ferns alongside the trail, as seen in these next four photos:



We finally reach an elevation where the fog is less thick and we begin to see some sunlight through the trees:



Looking down the steep hillside and through the trees:



This is a very nice stretch of trail:



There are also a surprising density of foliage alongside the trail in some places:



All too soon, we reach the junction with the Meadow Trail:



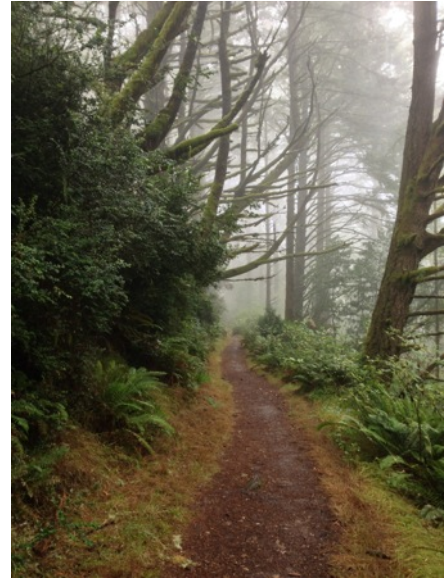
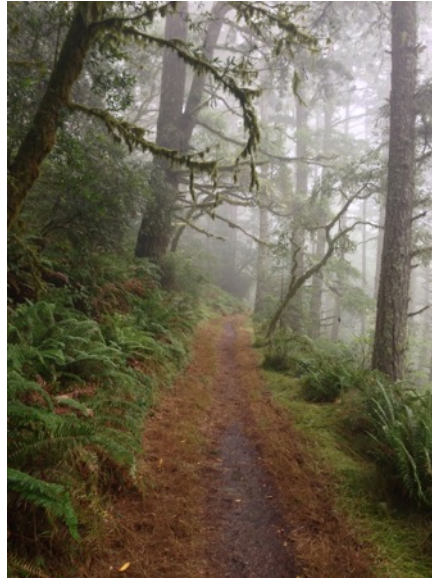
Looking towards the fog in the trees where the Sky Trail continues towards the Old Pine Trail:



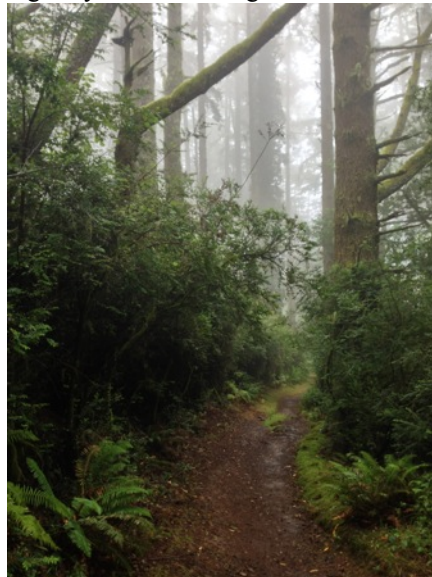
We encountered much more fog on this hike than the previous week, despite leaving an hour later and this being a longer hike:



The fog also dripped off the trees, and the start of the Meadow Trail was muddy with puddles rather than being dusty as it had been the previous week:



The tall huckleberry bushes make a narrow passageway to walk through here:



This is yet another particularly scenic stretch of trail, with the moss hanging off the branches of the huckleberry bushes:



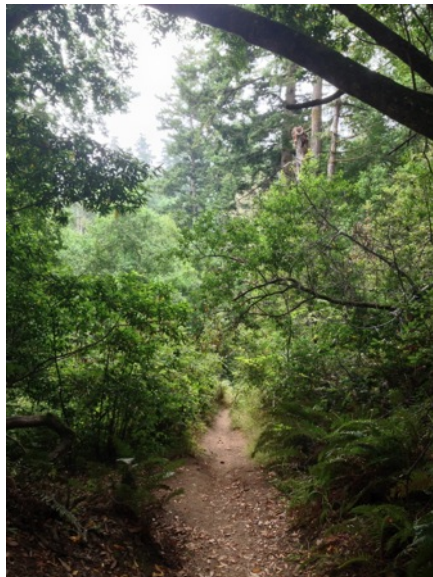
Crossing the (dry) meadow, we noticed that the fog still had not yet disappeared:



The Meadow Trail seems to be one of the more popular trails in this area, as evidenced by the number of hikers we encounter each time we hike it. I can see why, as it's a very pretty trail:



However, it also seems to be steeper than some of the other trails in this area, so care is needed when descending the particularly steep and dusty stretches of this trail:



Looking down at the main Bear Valley Trail from near where the Meadow Trail meets it:



There is a large collection of these orange flowers growing near the creek which runs through Bear Valley; unfortunately, however, many of them had been trampled by careless visitors, and this photo is of one of the few remaining un-squashed flowers:



This is the creek which runs alongside the main Bear Valley Trail:



I spotted this flower growing near the main trail; I'm not sure what it is called:



Here is yet another tree nearly covered with vines; often in this area the vines are poison oak, but fortunately the ones I photographed on this hike were not:



The fog had lifted by the time we got back to the parking area at the Bear Valley Visitors Center, and it was clearing further inland:

