

exploring

Coasting Manresa and Sunset State Beaches

Neil Wiley

If you are looking for a place to relax for a day or more, Manresa and Sunset are good options. Located between Aptos and the Monterey County border, these two beaches share miles of golden, unspoiled, sandy shoreline below forested bluffs, perfect for a day hike or overnight camping.

These parks are far less crowded than other Santa Cruz County beaches. Although people cluster near the entrances, a short walk north or south along the wide and uninterrupted beaches will give you all the room and quiet you want.

You could walk north on the beach to LaSelva Beach, or south to the Pajaro River in Monterey County. In fact, if you don't mind a detour around Moss Landing, you could hike all the way to Monterey.

The Manresa Uplands section of the park does offer some short, forested trails, but there are only two public-access points between the beach and the uplands: the beach stairs near the park entrance, and a ramp at the south end of the park. Across from each entrance is a lifeguard tower.

Tables at the top of the bluff with panoramic views encourage picnicking at Manresa. Sunset counters with picnic tables and two large ramadas for special events.

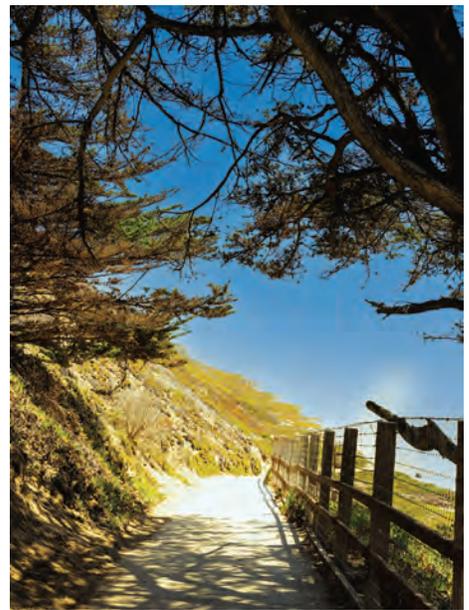
If you need to carry umbrellas, food, ice chests, blankets, and other paraphernalia to the beach, Sunset makes life easier. You can drive south on Shell Road to a parking area next to the beach. No stairs! Manresa Uplands campers do have a paved ramp to the beach that allows use of carts, wagons, and wheelchairs.

Manresa has posted warnings about hazardous swimming and surfing, but I saw many young surfers and boogie boarders enjoying the mild surf conditions. Children were wading in shallow water. Be careful. Rip currents, cold water, offshore holes, and high-surf conditions can be dangerous.

Camping. If you have a tent, the Manresa Uplands is a good choice. No RVs are permitted. A separate parking lot for campers serves 64 walk-in tent sites. Overnight parking is a long way from the beach, but you can unpack at a twenty-minute-limit lot that is a bit closer.

Sunset has ninety shady, dune-protected





sites without hookups along Shell Road that can accept vehicles up to 31 feet long. Each site has a lock box for food, a metal fire pit, and a picnic table. Cost per night per car is \$35. If you bike or hike in, the cost is \$5.

Choose your camp site. The Sunset Dunes Camp has the most shade. The Sunset South Camp is closer to the beach.

Fishing. I saw fishermen on both beaches. The ones I talked to hadn't caught any fish. The official brochure reports that flounder,



halibut, perch, and bass have been caught at Manresa. Sunset fishermen have claimed perch, sardine, and bass. You'll need a sport fishing license before casting your line.

Wildlife. Birdlife includes the typical shorebirds, especially the federally protected western snowy plovers that nest on the beach, flocks of walking sandpipers, and flying pelicans. In the scrub brush, you may see quail, little towhees, and several lizard species. The intertidal areas host sand crabs, purple olive snails, beach hoppers, and Pismo clams. Sea otters swim offshore. Further out, you may see gray whales.

Both parks have bathrooms and coin-operated showers. Dogs are allowed on-leash at Manresa, but only in the campground at Sunset. Parking at either park for day use is \$10 (\$9 for seniors). If you wish to see Sunset and Manresa in the same day, your day pass allows entry to both.

It's a good idea to bring a map. You can use the map shown in this article, get one at the park entrance, or print one from the Sunset and Manresa State Beaches brochure

available at the website: www.parks.ca.gov.

Directions. To reach the parks, take Highway 17 or Soquel/San Jose Road south to Highway 1 south. For Manresa and Sunset, turn right at San Andreas Road. Watch for the park signs.

For Manresa Beach and Manresa Upland, turn right on Manresa State Beach Road. For Sunset State Beach, pass Manresa State Beach Road and Monterey Bay Academy. Turn right on Sunset Beach Road.

To use your GPS, select one of these addresses. Manresa State Beach (Day-use only), 1445 San Andreas Road, Watsonville, CA, 95076. For Manresa Upland (Campground), 205 Manresa Upland Road, Watsonville, CA 95076. For Sunset State Beach, 201 Sunset Beach Road, Watsonville, CA 95076.

To make camping reservations for either park, visit reservcalifornia.com.

It may be a little longer drive, but these beaches offer smaller crowds, nicer sand, and cleaner water.

Enjoy.