

exploring

The City of Santa Cruz

Pogonip

Neil Wiley

Let's begin with the name. Pogonip could have been named for a special bouncing stick, a gaming website, Walt Kelly's comic strip's title character (an opossum), or my brother's little dog that bit him when we wrestled.

Instead, pogonip describes a phenomenon that occurs in the mountains of the western United States when fog condenses into tiny, biting ice particles. The word comes from the Shoshone tribe language as *payinappih* (cloud). In the 1800s, English-speaking settlers altered the word to pogonip. In turn, this led to the phrase **Beware the Pogonip**.

This phrase exaggerated the danger of breathing icy fog. It also reflects today's rumors that Pogonip Open Space is unsafe. While the southern area is shared by homeless people, indications of drug use, and the development of the Homeless Garden Project, I never felt threatened.

If this is a concern, you can avoid the more urban park entrances at Harvey West Park and Golf Club Drive. Instead, you can park at the end of the residential Spring Street or at the U.C., Santa Cruz upper campus along Glen Coolidge Drive. The Spring Street entrance gives you a longer, but flatter route. The Glen Coolidge Drive entrance requires a steep, but short, climb back to your car at the hike's end, but the beautiful scenic views of ocean, forest, and meadows are worth a little sweat. (The entrance has no signs, but you'll see cars parked on the right side of the road.) Long-distance hikers, bikers, and equestrians can park at Henry Cowell State



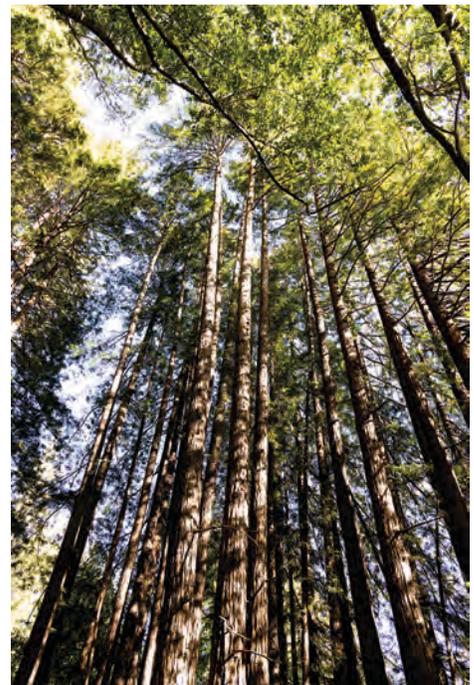
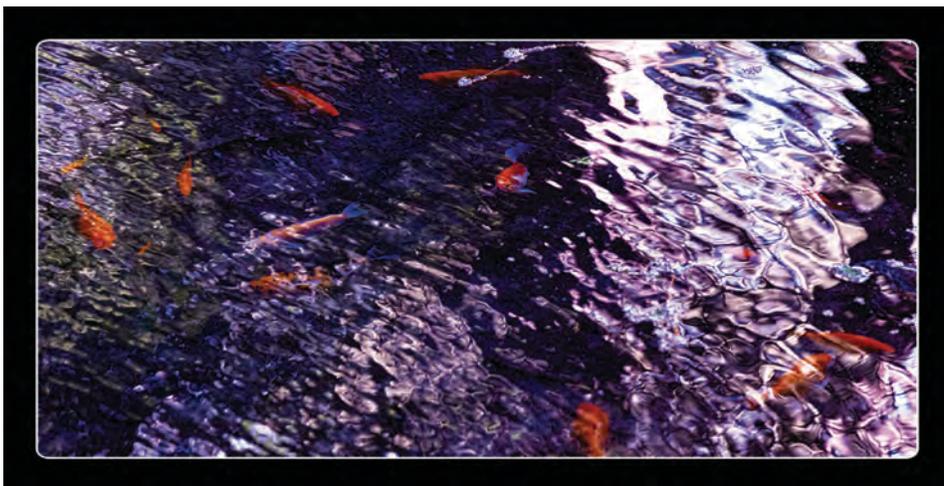
Park, and then take the Rincon Connector Trail to the north end of Pogonip.

What's it like? In a relatively small 640 acres, this open-space preserve packs many interesting sights and different environments. Enjoy views of Monterey Bay, green hills, and Santa Cruz. Visit

historical lime kilns, a small koi pond, a giant rock garden, and an old clubhouse. Hike trails under forest shade (oaks, madrone, bay, eucalyptus), walk in the sun through giant meadows, or go upland to see 100-foot-high firs. (If you are an expert, you may find the only four redwoods in the park.)

The entrances are not well-marked, but most major trail intersections have small signs. Climbs are easy to moderate. (The exceptions are the rather steep Lookout Trail and the unmarked path up to the Glen Coolidge Drive entrance.)

To reach the interesting single-track Spring Box Trail, walk north on the Spring Trail. Watch for three white steps on the left just past a tiny step-over stream. The trail takes you past an unsigned koi pond on the right, and then up and right to the Lime Kiln Trail and the lime kilns. A few steps to the right you'll see a path up and behind the lime kilns. A right on the path takes you to a little valley filled with more than a





hundred rock pyramids and other pieces of rock art. If there was the slightest tremor, they would have fallen. It reminded me that art is temporary.

A narrow trail past the rock garden loops back to the intersection of Lime Kiln, Rincon, and Fern trails. Although you won't see many ferns until near the end of this trail, the Fern Trail is a pleasant walk through almost a mile of mixed forest. I met only one person on this trail. He was going the hard way—uphill.

When you reach the large meadow called the Prairie, turn left on Brayshaw Trail, or go through the fence and turn left on Prairie Trail. Either route takes you to the only two picnic tables in the park. After a brief rest, you'll soon reach the abandoned clubhouse of the Casa del Rey Club and Golf Links, established in 1912. Although protected by a chain link fence, the old clubhouse still reflects the grandeur of a rustic resort. You can still see the tennis courts, filled-in swimming pool, and some nice views of Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay. Although the clubhouse is destined to be demolished, it's still an interesting old building.

When the golf club closed in the 1930s, Dorothy Deming Wheeler reopened the facility as a polo field. The Pogonip Social



march 2022



and Polo Club became internationally famous, perhaps because it was one of the few polo fields open to coed and women's teams.

To complete the return loop, you can walk the Brayshaw Trail, with a left on Spring, and a turn right at the unsigned path to the Glen Coolidge Drive. If you are parked on Spring Street, continue on Spring Trail south to your car.

Of Pogonip's 11.5-mile trail system, only four are open to multi-use (including bicycles and horses). They include the 1.5-mile Emma McCrary Trail that runs along the length of the park from Golf Club Drive. This trail connects to Henry Cowell Redwood State Park via the Rincon Connector Trail, and to U.C., Santa Cruz via the U-Con Trail.

Walkers without dogs can enjoy the 1.2-mile Pogonip Creek Nature Trail and the 0.5-mile Lookout Trail with views earned by climbs.

Walkers with leashed dogs can walk most Pogonip trails, including Brayshaw, Fern, Limekiln, Lower Meadow, Ohlone, Prairie, Spring, Spring Box, and a section of Rincon.

The Spring Trail is a relatively flat, wide, shady, and mostly smooth dirt trail with some rocky sections. Perhaps because the trail is next to U.C., Santa Cruz, most hikers were young. I saw young runners,

a few groups of young women, and dog walkers of every age.

On my return hike, I walked slower until I reached the Spring Trail where, by chance, I met a friendly woman. We shared travel stories, occupations, and trivia that made the walk more interesting. We turned up a narrow, unsigned trail to where cars were parked. The view was great. A hawk flew a few feet away from me.

One problem. I had parked my car at the Spring Road entrance. We were at Glen Coolidge Drive.

I was preparing to walk several miles, but my new friend said, "I'll drive you." She did. In a world of COVID and paranoia, this woman helped a stranger. I hope I can pass it on—perhaps past COVID.

