

# exploring

*The Best Hike Ever!*

## Lands End

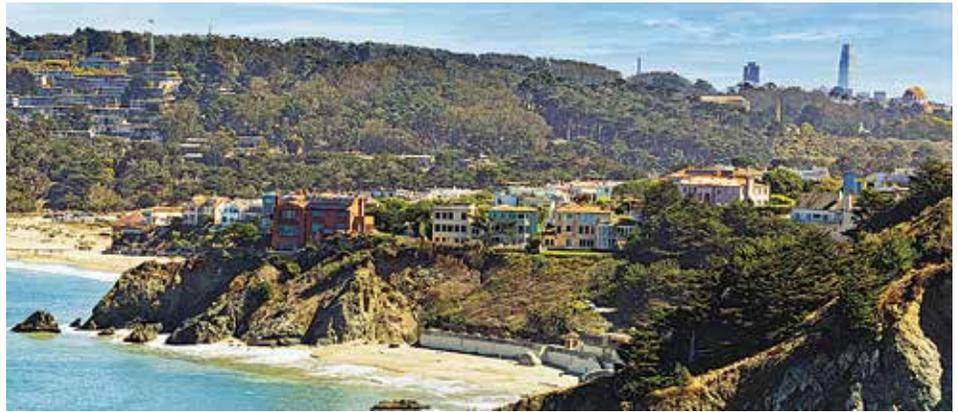
Neil Wiley

I've walked trails in California for more than fifty years. Although I've enjoyed every walk, the 3.25-mile loop at Lands End was my best hike ever. Here's why.

**A scenic feast.** Driving along miles of the arrow-straight Great Highway, I saw one of the longest beaches I've ever seen, with an extra-wide background of the Pacific Ocean. After months of lockdown, it was good to see giant open spaces of land and water. Yet it wasn't lonely. To the right were miles of level trails occupied by runners, walkers, and bike-riders, singles, couples, and families, all happy humans enjoying the day.

I drove up a hill, and then turned left to park at the Lands End Lookout Visitor Center. Now the scenery was enhanced by views from a higher viewpoint featuring ocean, giant rock islands covered with birds, and the remains of the historic Sutro Baths. The baths were built in 1894, then closed in 1965. During demolition, the building burned down under suspicious circumstances, but you can still see the concrete walls. (I don't miss swimming in a giant pool after seeing Glenwood Springs pool in Colorado filled with more than a hundred children. It didn't look healthy.)

**Very walkable.** The Lands End Trail is a few steps away. You can see the ocean as you walk along the coast through a forest of cypress and eucalyptus trees and flowering plants. This trail is handicap-accessible



until the Mile Rock Overlook. It is bike-accessible until the Eagle's Point steps. A spur trail takes users to Mile Rock Point and Mile Rock Beach. Several side trails take you down to the beach, but the main trail is relatively level, wide, well-groomed smooth dirt. Cool breezes and shade make it comfortable, even on a warm day.

In less than a quarter-mile you reach the site of the memorial for the USS San Francisco WW II cruiser. If you can't walk up the short flight of stairs, you can park your car in a lot near the top of the stairs next to the memorial, and then start your hike here.

The memorial commemorates the one-hundred sailors and seven marines who died aboard the ship. The memorial features actual parts from the ship's bridge that show some of the damage received in WW II battles for Guadalcanal.

**A friendly environment.** Several benches and tables at the memorial offer a nice place to rest or picnic while sharing views of the ocean, ships, small boats, and the Golden Gate Bridge. While I was there, I saw many

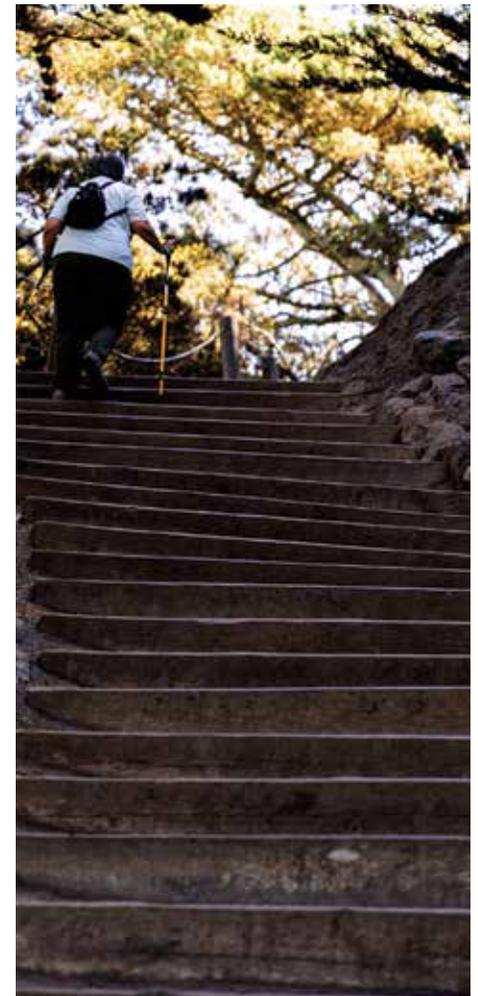
young and old people. (The in-betweens may have been working.) We shared many *good morning* and *beautiful day* salutations. People seemed happy to be here and alive on this weekday. Leashed dogs are welcome.

It's about a mile-and-a-half to Eagle's Point. Along the way, several outlooks provided views of the ocean and the Golden Gate Bridge. The bridge and I were born in 1937. One of us aged well.

As I approached Eagle's Point, I reached a long, steep set of stairs climbing 318 feet. Fortunately, on the way up, I found a sittable slab built into the rock.



*The remains of the Sutro Baths*



Unfortunately, as I caught my breath, a group of elderly women passed me. I thought, "If they can make it, so can I." I reached the top in a few minutes with a few stops for gasps of air.

**More variety.** I was soon at a street and path named El Camino Del Mar. To complete the loop, I followed the path next to the street through the green greens of Lincoln Park Golf Course to the Legion of Honor. How many hikes do you know that offer a stop at a fine-art museum?

The Legion of Honor was the gift of Alma Spreckels, wife of the sugar magnate and thoroughbred racehorse owner/breeder Adolph B. Spreckels. The museum opened on Armistice Day, November 11, 1924, but has been renovated several times. It now displays a collection spanning more than 6,000 years of ancient and European art. It also houses the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts.

Although some pieces look modern in style, the building and the art it displays convey a classical dignity. I walked through each large display room, quietly observing each piece of art with my cap in my hands. A walk through history and many cultures is \$15 (\$12 for seniors). The museum café serves hot sandwiches, salads, tea, and pastries. The schedule changes with the season. For current museum and café information, call 415-750-3600, or visit [legionofhonor.famsf.org](http://legionofhonor.famsf.org).

After my museum tour, I continued my walk down El Camino Del Mar. In a short distance, the road ended, but the trail continued into Lands End, and then joined the Coastal Trail back to the Lands End Lookout Visitor Center and my car.

I drove down the Great Highway where I stopped to see a beautiful old windmill in a small, lovely park. I drove to Highway 280, but then detoured via Highway 84 to Skyline Boulevard to enjoy a hamburger at Alice's Restaurant, then south on Skyline to Black Road and Old Santa Cruz Highway. It was a great day!

If you would like to replicate my hike, park at the Lands End Lookout and Visitor Center, 680 Point Lobos Avenue, San Francisco, 94121, off the Great Highway. If you want other options, see the map for three other parking locations: the USS San Francisco Memorial parking lot, roadside parking along El Camino Del Mar, and in the Legion of Honor parking lot.

