Welcome to

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

Please use this self-guided walking tour to find marine life making homes where land, air and sea all come together. Plants, algae and animals adopt diverse strategies to survive in an environment that changes with the tides, the seasons and the ages. These creatures need us, as visitors to their homes, to adapt our behavior to this unique environment. With our help, these creatures will continue to inspire generations of future human visitors.

Please do not collect, disturb or remove anything from this California Marine Protected Area (MPA).

Open to begin your visit!

Linda Goertzen

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Before you explore life on the edge at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, are you prepared to:
• spend at least 45 minutes?
• climb up and down stairs?
• keep your balance on wet, slippery surfaces?

If you answered “yes” to all of these questions, and you have checked the Visitor Center’s tide chart to see if the tide will dip below 1.0’, you can probably follow the route described here.

Earth-shaping forces create the edges where marine life makes a home. To your left, San Vicente Creek runs down a trace of the Seal Cove Fault. This fault continues beneath the waves toward Point Reyes (visible on clear days). East of the fault, earthquakes push the cliffs upward, while storm waves during extreme high tides wear away their bases. West of the fault, these earthquakes lift soft rocks from the deep sea floor to sea level. As waves pound the former sea floor, they wear away the softest materials. Retreating tides leave the low areas full of seawater. These tidepools and the surrounding rocks provide homes for organisms tough enough to withstand stresses from both land and sea.

Go down the stairs and cross the creek. Stay 100 yards/92 meters—the length of a football field—from any seals or other marine mammals. Federal law prohibits disturbing marine mammals. Stop and read before proceeding down the beach.

Marine mammals seek these shores for safety. Harbor seals find plenty of food in the cold Northern Pacific Ocean, but the harbor seals can become food themselves for sharks and other large predators in the open water. “Safe harbors” like Fitzgerald Marine Reserve allow harbor seals to haul out of the water, rest and warm up any time of year. Harbor seals may also use these rocks as nurseries, giving birth and nursing their pups in the spring.

One of the greatest threats to marine mammals comes from the land. Humans hunted many marine mammal species to the brink of extinction. Federal law now protects marine mammals as their populations recover. Please do your part: observe harbor seals from a safe distance (100 yards/92 meters) to allow them to rest.

If you can continue without disturbing the seals, walk down the beach and out onto the rocks.

Please abide by the following “good tidepooler rules” to help protect and preserve this Marine Protected Area (MPA). Observe the marine life—do not touch it!
• Never remove plants, animals, shells, feathers, rocks or driftwood.
• Never pick up or move any plant or animal.
• Never feed any animal.
• Never pick up or turn over rocks.
• Walk gently, taking care not to step on plants or animals.
• Do not walk through the tidepools.
• Do not disturb harbor seals. Stay a safe distance away from them. If orange cones are present on the beach or reef, do not cross or walk between the cones. Stay on the beach side of the cones.