



Natural Bridges Santa Cruz, CA

Y0328 vers: Sep 22nd, 2025

Important information

- In case of an emergency dial 911.
- This map and directions may only be used in conjunction with a signed American Volkssport Association athletic waiver. All other uses are prohibited.
- POC: Holly Pelking (408) 859-7978
- If you spot errors or omissions in this document you may email the POC at ilex56@yahoo.com
- This is an Online Start Box (OSB) event. Please remember to "finish" the event by returning to the "my.ava.org" web site.
- Distance is 5, 10 or 14K
- Difficulty is 1B (1A "no beach sand" option)
- Restrooms available in Park (250m) and along the route

The Walk description

This walk starts on the inland side of the Natural Bridges State park. You will walk through the park and visit the butterflies if they are present (November to March).

The walk continues out to the beach and then follows the coastal pathway along the ocean. This is a very popular walk with many of the local residents out walking, running and bicycling. Stop to watch the surfers and spontaneous activities along the way.

While proofing this walk, there was a pod of 12 dolphins playing in the bay. Seals and otters are much harder to spot.

The 14K turn around is at the Santa Cruz wharf where breakfast or lunch is always a welcome break. The 10K walk will take you to the Surfing Museum.

The walk is out and back with a short detour outbound. You can easily choose your own distance.

Drive to the start instructions

Your destination is the inland side of Natural Bridges State park. Do not follow signage or GPS navigation as it will take you to PAY parking.

From Hwy 1 North from Santa Cruz, Turn LEFT at Western Dr. (Next after Swift St.) on the outskirts of the city. From Hwy 1 South from Half Moon Bay, turn RIGHT at Western Dr. as you near Santa Cruz.

Go to the end and turn RIGHT and 200ft. later turn LEFT onto Natural Bridges Dr. Go to the end where you will see the back entrance to the park. This is the START POINT. There is ample, free, street side parking.

The Walk directions

- From where you parked, make your way to the park entrance gate. This entrance is blocked to traffic, but pedestrians have easy access.
1. **Walk down the road till you see the ranger station on your right. The entrance to the butterfly grove is on your left.**
- Restrooms available here or a little further, 600m, on the trail.

WARNING: NO DOGS ARE ALLOWED ON THE BOARDWALK.

2. **Enter the wooden boardwalk down into the grove. Walk to the end, turn around and return to the road.**
- The butterflies are fickle. They often overwinter in this grove, but every now and then the weather conspires against them. Early rains and high winds can force them to seek shelter elsewhere further north. You can visit the ranger station for exhibits and information.
 - Trivia: Look on the sign boards and find how cold it can get before the butterflies won't flutter.
3. **Upon exiting the boardwalk, turn LEFT and continue down the road.**

WARNING: Watch for traffic as the road is now also used by vehicles.

4. **At the bottom of the slight hill, you will see restrooms and the beach access on your right.**
- NOTE for 5K walkers - you will NOT have another restroom opportunity until you return.
- ALL DISTANCES: WE SUGGEST THAT YOU DO NOT GO ONTO THE BEACH AT THIS POINT TO KEEP THE SAND OUT OF YOUR SHOES.**
5. **Continue on the road as it winds up to the park entrance next to the ocean. (1K)**
- The natural bridge that gave the park it's name has collapsed. This activity occurs naturally along the coast, but this bridge was iconic. It was possible to walk out across the bridge to the end of the spit. Fortunately no one was hurt when the bridge collapsed in the night.

6. **Exit the park using the vehicle entrance onto the paved pathway between the ocean and West Cliff Dr.**
 7. **Follow this pathway until you reach the 5K turn around point at the corner of Sunset Ave. and West Cliff Dr.**
- There is a big yellow life ring on a pole and stair access down the cliff to the beach.
- ⇒ **5K TURNAROUND: Skip to step 21**
8. **Continue on the ocean side path. Watch for a house with a water tower beyond it and the STOP sign at Woodrow Ave.**

9. Turn LEFT to cross West Cliff Dr. and walk 10 to 15 steps to the trail onto the Bethany Curve Walkway.
10. Turn LEFT onto the walkway.
11. Follow the walkway two blocks to Alta Ave. Cross Alta and turn RIGHT.
- Find the Little Free Library on the Left side of the street (223 Alta).
12. Continue to Woodrow Ave. Cross and turn RIGHT.
13. Walk two blocks to Pelton Ave and turn LEFT walking on the right side of the street.
14. Turn RIGHT on Clark Ave., (Mayflower qualifier). Clark Ave. ends at Columbia St.
15. Turn RIGHT and return to West Cliff Dr.
16. Cross West Cliff Dr. (3 way stop) and turn LEFT, continuing to the Surfing Museum.
- Look for the natural bridge visible from the trail.
- The Surfing Museum is the ground floor of the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse.
17. Circle the lighthouse, with the building on your left, for the best views of the surfers, paddle boarders, and perhaps seals and otters.

CHECKPOINT: From what place did surfing come to California?

- Check out the free Museum - donations accepted (open 12 to 4pm, closed Tues & Weds).
- Restrooms are about 200m further along the trail and across the road. Please use a crosswalk.

18. From the Museum, turn RIGHT on West Cliff Dr to continue 0.5K to the statue of the surfer.
- ⇒ 10K TURNAROUND: Skip to step 21
19. 14K walkers, continue on the seaside path all the way to the entrance for the Municipal Wharf.
20. Walk all the way out to the end of the wharf.
- There are likely to be surfers, paddle boarders in the water. Stop and watch. There are restaurants where you can get a bowl of chowder. It's part of why you walk, right?
21. You will return to the entrance for Natural Bridges state park following only the footpath between the ocean and West Cliff Dr.
22. When you reach the Natural Bridges park entrance, you will walk in a short way, past the ranger booth, until you see access to the beach on your left. You may choose to stay on the road to return to the start, or go down onto the beach.
23. If choosing the beach option, watch your footing down the slope on the sand. Note the restrooms that you passed on the way out are hidden in the trees to your right, just past the blue life guard station.
24. Exit the beach passing the bathroom building, turn LEFT, and return to the start point via the road.

Thank you for walking with the South Bay Striders.
Happy trails.

