



▲ The dusty trail to Bass Lake winds along the Pacific Coast before a slight climb to Bass Lake.

PHOTO BY DAVID ENGLE

BY CINDY DAUER

Hidden in the jungle canopy of invasive eucalyptus trees is a narrow country road leading to the sleepy Bolinas Peninsula and one of the North Bay's finest coastal trail systems.

The Palomarin is a trail that weaves over the Point Reyes National Seashore, spurring off in many directions. Connecting trails like the Lake Ranch Trail, the Ridge trail, and the Crystal Lake trail, offer diversity of sights and physical challenges.

Bass Lake is the closest destination to the trailhead,

an easy 2.5 miles with gentle upslopes. The way is dotted with purple thistles, fall berries and delicate little buttercups.

Whether you're a stressed out city dweller or a seasoned outdoor enthusiast, Bass Lake has something to meet your heart's desire and your recreational needs.

First visitors are treated to scenic views of the jagged Pacific coastline and twinkling blue water that stretches as far as the eye can see. Then in a valley higher up in the hills, Bass Lake resides, serving as the ultimate swimming hole; with relatively clean water and the ever-classic rope swing

for thrill seekers to catapult themselves into the depths.

Leisure lovers can lounge lazily on inflatable toys while drifting aimlessly across the lake. A modest-sized area of cleared land near the water's lip serves as a makeshift beach where sunbathers can absorb their rays and swimmers can dry off. The spot is ideal for a picnic, but be sure to bring something to sit on because there aren't any picnic tables.

Advanced hikers and those who enjoy a physical challenge can proceed another mile and a half down the trail to a stunning waterfall, Alamere Falls. This small stream pours right over a cliff onto a sandy beach.

The mini fertile crescent which encompasses the upper falls resembles something of a bonsai-style hydroponic garden. Wild orchids with sprawling roots grow on the cliff side, iridescent mosses glimmer on the rocks, and lush semi-tropical plants thrive in swirling pools of crystal clear water.

The trail leading to the falls is a bit overgrown yet still quite manageable. But be forewarned: It requires some hand-over-hand scrambling up and down crumbling cliffs of sedimentary basalt.

Unlike most of the popular Bay Area recreation destinations that are easily accessible by public transportation, you'll need a car to traverse some of California's narrowest, windiest, and most scenic back roads that lead you to this little slice of paradise. [x]