Rim Trail

EFFORT	Moderate
LENGTH	4+ miles
GEOLOGICAL FEATURE(S)	Rock Collecting, Rock Formations
LOCATION	Patrick's Point State Park

Description: In addition to dramatic shorelines, sandy beaches, sea stacks, and tidepools, this park offers a reconstructed Yurok village to investigate, Sumeg Village. Consider walking that trail near the visitor center before or after this one and spend the entire day in the park.

The Rim Trail runs for two miles along the ocean bluffs, connecting several of the popular stops and terminating at Agate Beach where we will do some poking about for pretty rocks. If your time is limited, you can pick up the trail at Patrick's Point or Mussel Rock to shorten the hike. Be forewarned that the coastline is often fogbound in summer. Sometimes beach hikes are best done in winter when other places may be less hospitable.

At the edge of the Palmer's Point parking area, you will find an interpretive panel explaining the grisly discovery of over 1,000 sea lion skulls on offshore Cone Rock, each with a hole drilled in it. Archeologists deduce this to be the remnants of hunting rituals. One of the skulls is mounted inside the case.

Before hiking the featured trail, you may want to wander out to Palmer's Point for a look-see. It is doubtful that you will hike only the length of the Rim Trail, so your hike will be determined by how many side trips you take.

To find the beginning of the Rim Trail, walk back down the road a short distance. It is signed and located on the left of the road. The trail heads north, following the coastal bluff, giving you commanding views of the rugged coast and Trinidad Head to the

south. Offshore, sea stacks provide resting places for sea lions, seals, cormorants, gulls, brown pelicans, black oystercatchers, and pigeon guillemots.

Sea stacks are isolated resistant rocks that are located near shore and project above sea level. They are sometimes the remnants of an arch or natural bridge. A natural bridge occurs when the waves erode softer sediments away from more resistant rock in such a way as to wear right through the middle. As the process continues over a long time, wearing the "legs" of the bridge thinner, the top collapses under its own weight, leaving two sea stacks. This evolution is well demonstrated at Natural Bridges State Park near Santa Cruz. When the park was established, there were bridges, but today there are none.

Vegetation along the bluff includes alder, spruce, Douglas fir, pine, Douglas iris, salal, trillium, rhododendrons, and azaleas. Ferns line the trails and berry vines and wildflowers are prolific in summer. Vegetation piles up on itself in places, so don't be surprised if you start to imagine yourself in Jurassic Park on some stretches of this trail.

As you hike, you will encounter many spur trails leading to overlooks and beaches. Enrich your experience by taking these side trips. The windy trails down to Abalone Point, Patrick's Point, Wedding Rock, and Mussel Rocks make for a delightfully varied hike.

This park was once underwater. When the seas receded, the huge rocks just offshore emerged into view. Abalone Point is just 0.4 miles from the trailhead. Next will be Lookout Rock and Patrick's Point. After 1.5 miles, you come up to the spur trail leading to Mussel Rock. Go out towards it, through a natural arbor, and notice that a huge fracture has developed on the left side. Imagine that massive chunk of rock

breaking free and falling into the sea. Some day, that is exactly what will happen. Erosion can be an extremely slow process, but moments do occur where a great change takes place instantaneously, like when an arch collapses or rocks break off and fall.

Clamber around the stone steps of Mussel Rock where stone walls have been erected to keep visitors from plummeting off. If you train your binoculars on the large sharp rock to the left, you will probably see birds roosting there, pelicans or cormorants.

Return to the Rim Trail and continue. You will reach the end of the trail at Agate Beach Campground after two miles. There is a parking lot here, so if you came just to look for rocks, you can park here and skip the Rim Trail.

From the parking area, take the steep trail down to a staircase that leads to Agate Beach. Once you are on the beach, look back at the cliff face. You can easily see the various bedding layers revealed there. On the bottom is the dark greenstone layer, and then Tertiary gravel above it. The top layer is sandstone.

Allow some time to search for agates, jade, and red jaspar in the gravel bars. Most people do find agates if they have a little patience. You can walk along in the surf and look for them where the rough gravel lies, or you can sift through the dry sand up higher on the beach. The agates are glassy, translucent, and nearly white, so they contrast with the darker pebbles. They vary in size, but are normally about the size of a dime or smaller. There are plenty of quartz pieces here as well. You can distinguish the agates from them easily enough, as you cannot see into the quartz.

Agates, banded chalcedony, are semi-precious gemstones which vary greatly in form and color and historically were highly prized. Chalcedony is a type of cryptocrystalline quartz, which means that the crystals are too small to be seen even with

a microscope. Agates are formed in vesicular volcanic rocks by a process that is not completely understood. The volcanic rocks have cavities (vesicles) because of escaping gases. The agate forms when groundwater percolates through the volcanic rock, leaving behind a micro layer of precipitated silica in the vesicle. The vesicles in the host rock are often round; thus, the precipitated layers will be seen as concentric bands. Although the agates found here are generally white, agates occur in many different colors, depending on what other dissolved chemicals happened to be in the precipitating groundwater. Time your visit to coincide with low tide, so you will be able to find the newly deposited stones. Agate collecting is best after a winter storm. Also, some people suggest looking for discarded agates at the base of the stairs leading to the beach. After a day at the beach picking up rocks, some folks toss them out before they leave.

Agate Beach has many pretty surf-polished stones in addition to agates. If you are a rockhound, you will find this a rewarding spot to visit.

When you're ready, head back the way you came.

Directions: From Eureka, proceed 30 miles north on Highway 101 (Redwood Highway), to just north of the town of Trinidad. Exit on Patrick's Point Drive and follow it to the park entrance. Follow the signs to Palmer Point, about 0.25 miles past the entrance. There is a day-use fee. Restrooms are available.