

Northern California

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 - 3

Point Reyes National Park

After arriving at San Francisco's International Airport we'll drive over the famous Golden Gate Bridge and into wealthy Marin County. It feels somewhat strange to have such a large expanse of fabulous habitats just ninety minutes drive from one of western America's largest and oldest cities, but then this rather sums up the region - it is a land of contrasts. Point Reyes National Park contains over a hundred square miles of coastal scrub, meadows, marshlands and pine forests. One of the most important sites for flowers on the Pacific seaboard, it can also lay claim to being California's premier coastal birding hotspot. Huge blubbery Northern Elephant Seals lounge on the beach near Chimney Rock. Groups of Surf Scoters, the males with rather comical peach and white bills, keep a watchful eye on sleek Californian Sea Lions cavorting in the shallows. Pacific Loons, Western Grebes and Pigeon Guillemots bob up and down in the water whilst Brown Pelicans hurl themselves down at passing fish. The flowery cliffs support *Ranunculus californicus*, *Sidalcea malvaeflora* and the amazingly named *Trifolium wormskioldii* whilst nearby pastures have massed displays of *Lupinus arboreus* and the lovely deep blue *Iris douglasiana*. Bright orange clumps of *Escholtzia californica* line roadsides in a spectacular blaze of colour attracting American Painted Ladies and the swallowtail *Papilio zelicaon*. Pretty blue *Sisyrinchium bellum* adorns dune slacks where we can see Red-winged and Tri-colored Blackbirds, Cinnamon Teal and Hen Harrier. Black-headed Grosbeak and the beautiful California Quail feed amid orange *Mimulus aurantiacus*, the striking Franciscan Paintbush, and our very own Foxglove!

We'll likely encounter our first *Calochortus* here, the lovely Pussy Ears or *Calochortus tolmiei*, the hairy petals providing the common name. This is a variable species and as we head north to the Lower Trinity Mountains we'll see a number of forms. The flora along our route north is rich indeed and amongst Arbutus and Rhododendrons we'll find *Clintonia andrewsiana*, *Heuchera macrantha*, *Zigadenus fremontii* and the spectacular blooms of *Lilium maritimum*. *Trillium ovatum*, fabulous red *Delphinium nudicaule*, *Viola sempervirens*, *Eriophyllum lanatum* and white *Iris fernaldii* will be some of the botanical treats.

Days 4 & 5

The Mendocino Pass

Just east of the small town of Covelo the Pacific coastal ranges rise towards the wonderful Mendocino Pass. Though we will already have seen our first *Calochortus* species, we'll now have a chance to see some magnificent shows of these beautiful and often brightly-coloured members of the lily family, known locally as Mariposa Lilies, Globe-tulips or Fairy Lanterns. The drooping yellow flowers of *Calochortus amabilis* will soon become commonplace and later we'll find a frilly

white lavender-flushed form of *Calochortus tolmiei*. Foothill Penstemon puts on a fine show with the rich blue hues of Coast Larkspur *Delphinium decorum* and groups of *Brodiaea laxa* and *Brodiaea hyacinthina*. Tall yet delicate Scarlet Fritillary shelters amidst scrub oaks. Up on the pass open spruce forest and sparsely grassed rocky hillsides host yet more wonderful flowers. Sagebush Lizards scuttle amongst the green and purple bells of *Fritillaria affinis* whilst nearby are *Dodecathaon hendersonii*, *Trillium chloropetalum* and *Viola purpurea*. Beautiful *Dicentra formosa* grows alongside melting snowpatches not far from the road.

Days 6 - 8

Coastal Redwood Country

The fantastic scenery of the Klamath Coastal Drive takes us almost to the border with Oregon. Ospreys, Pacific Loons, Belted Kingfishers and Harbour Seals will be seen along the shore and inland are meadows in which the impressive Tule Elk graze among *Iris purdyi*. From the geologically complex mountains inland to a stunningly beautiful shoreline, the range of habitats here is very impressive. Only a century or so ago the Coastal Redwood Forests dominated the coast from Monterey County all the way up into southern Oregon but today only pockets remain. Impressive pockets though! In the cathedral-like atmosphere of Jedediah Smith's Redwoods State Park we can appreciate the splendour of these lofty trees. Stout Grove contains some of the world's largest trees and in the deeply littered understory we'll find an abundance of ferns (there's even a fern workshop here!) among flowering *Rhododendrons occidentale* and *macrophyllum*. Steller's Jays are boisterously unafraid while Hermit Warblers and beautiful Varied Thrushes are only slightly shyer. Nearby Lake Earl provides some great birdwatching. Tree Swallows hawk over reed beds where we'll see Common Yellowthroats, the males brilliant in their spring garb. Common birds in the woods include Hairy Woodpeckers and both Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Calypso Orchids are a marvellous sight on the forest floor and we'll look for the little orchid *Listera cordata* amongst *Maianthemum dilitatum* and the wonderful *Asarum caudatum*. Nearby we'll find the glowing intensely coloured blooms of *Lilium pardalinum*.

We'll venture into Oregon for a day where some rich botanising awaits us. The Siskiyoues have long been famous for their unusual and very beautiful flowers, a number of which occur nowhere else in the world. *Darlingtonia californica* bogs are a great place to start investigating the fascinating flora of the inland forests and hills. The *Darlingtonia*'s pitchers are a strange sight, their oddity only matched by the flowers that these partially carnivorous plants produce. Around one bog we'll find a fantastic mixture of flowers. The beautiful Californian Lady's Slipper, an orchid endemic to this region, grows with *Iris macrosiphon*, *Trillium rivale*, *Viola cuneata*, and *Smilacina stellata*. Another bog along the coast has impressive Californian Lady's Slippers. Inland, the Rogue Valley, a stunning wilderness region, is home to the rare *Kalmiopsis leachiana* with its large cerise flowers. Mission Bells *Fritillaria lanceolata* grows in the florally exceptional Rough and Ready Flats, an area of ultramafic soils that though it receives some sixty inches of rain a year looks very desert-like. *Allium falcifolium* and *Camassia howellii* are two of the more

attractive bulbs but there's plenty more including *Calochortus uniflorus* and *Erythronium howellii*, and a rich assortment of *Brassicaceae*.

Irises are plentiful. Amongst *Phlox speciosa* and *Trillium tridentatum* we can find pretty *Iris tenax* subspecies *klamathensis* and rare *Iris bracteata*, the latter only found on the borders between these two states. *Calochortus elegans'* beautiful fringed white flowers appear amongst the ubiquitous bearberry bushes and with these we'll find beautiful *Iris innominata*. Very variable in flower colour, this iris ranges from yellow with maroon-brown veining to white-edged purple, the latter looking like the flowers have encountered a severe hoar frost! Roads take us up through wet Douglas Fir forests to the snow-covered tops where we'll find several species of *Erythronium* or Fawn Lily, including *Erythronium citrinum* and *Erythronium oreganum* subspecies *leucandrum*. There are *Fritillarias* too with the golden bells of *Fritillaria glauca* an arresting sight if they are still in flower. Beautiful 'dark-capped' *Viola beckwithii* can be seen growing with *Iris chrysophylla*. *Calochortus coeruleus* or Beaver-tail Grass is often common. Its flowers are extraordinarily hairy, the white to bluish hairs completely covering the white petals and almost hiding the lavender blue sepals beneath. Violet *Erythronium hendersonii* and delicate pale lemon *Erythronium klamathense* are two local specialities whilst *Xerophyllum tenax* or Bear Grass is widespread but nonetheless spectacular.

Days 9 - 12

Mount Shasta and Lower Klamath Lake including Willow Creek and Lewiston Lake

One of the volcanoes that form the backbone of the Cascades Range, Mount Shasta's 14,000 foot snow-capped peak will provide a stunning backdrop for our next couple of days. The mountainous landscapes around our base at McCloud are a delight with forests and rocky peaks, many of them still snow-covered, and everywhere rushing torrents and innumerable waterfalls. The impressive Middle and Upper Falls on the McCloud River offer a scenic and rather noisy arena in which to watch American Dipper. Bobbing in the crystal clear water, they make a fine picture with the large pink flowered saxifrage *Peltiphyllum peltatum* for a background. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels are very tame and in the trees are Townsend's Solitaire, Clark's Nutcracker and both Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. The surrounding countryside harbours Acorn Woodpecker, Anna's Hummingbird, Scrub Jay, Rufous-sided Towhee and several warblers including Black-throated Gray and Macgillivray's. The flora is very diverse and includes *Pedicularis densiflora*, violets such as *Viola lobata*, the beautiful *Delphinium nuttallianum*, while *Fritillaria atropurpurea* is sure to be a highlight. By Gumboot Lake we'll find *Anemone lyallii* and some fine *Penstemon newberryi*. Passing blue meadows of *Camassia quamash* with *Erythronium purpurascens* among *Hesperochiron californicus*, *Saxifraga oregano* and *Lewisia nevadensis* to delay us, we'll reach the nearby Lassen Volcanic Park. By snow we'll look for *Sarcodes sanguinea*, the bright red Snowplant. By a large waterfall behind which Black Swifts nest we'll see Evening Grosbeak and Cassin's Vireos. The delicate yellow-centred white falls of *Iris tenuissima* are common and we'll see *Thermopsis macrophylla* and *Asclepias cordifolia*.

Anyone into Cryptozoology will have heard of Willow Creek for this is the land of 'Big Foot' - so keep your eyes open! Breath-taking flowering bushes and small trees of *Cornus nuttallii* are found throughout these valleys and in the mountains above. Decorating slopes are the nodding yellow and white flowers of *Erythronium californicum* amid fine cushions of *Phlox diffusa*. Brick-red and yellow *Aquilegia formosa* is a wonderful sight in its native habitat, but even this beauty is eclipsed by the fantastic Firecracker Flower, *Dichelostemma ida-maia*. The tubular red flowers are pollinated by the Black-chinned Hummingbird which we may see in attendance.

Majestic Bald Eagles soar over River Otters as they play in the shallows of Klamath and Tule Lakes. Out on the water are groups of American White Pelicans and both Western and Clarke's Grebes. Lesser Scaup, Canvasback and the beautiful Bufflehead, the males glorious in their breeding plumage, are amongst a variety of ducks that also includes Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal and Redhead. Yellow-headed Blackbirds are common in the reeds and Black, Caspian and Forster's Terns hawk overhead. Canada Geese feed on the muddy margins along with White-faced Ibis and an assortment of waders including Wilson's Phalarope and the beautiful American Avocet.

Days 13 – 15

Tehama: The Sacramento River Valley & Clear Lake

California Quails often run across the road as we approach Tehama and once there we'll see a good variety of birds including Wild Turkeys, Western Bluebird, Black Phoebe and Sharp-shinned Hawk. Magnificent shows of yellow, white and even pink *Calochortus superbis* carpet the ground amongst scrub oak. Other lovely flowers include *Calochortus monophyllos*, *Dichelostemma congestum*, *Clarkia williamsoni* (and many other *Clarkia* species) and *Brodiaea elegans*. Grassy slopes host a pink haze of *Sidalcea hartwegii*, the blue spires of *Delphinium variegatum* and the blue stars of *Triteleia bridgesii*. In Colusa county we'll find the twining *Dichelostemma volubile* and the well-named *Calochortus splendens*, a beauty with large lilac-pink bells, up to four per plant. Near Clear Lake we'll look for Western Tiger Swallowtail and a rich assortment of birds including Bewick's Wren, Oak Bushtit, Nuttall's Woodpecker and California Towhee. Here we'll find *Calochortus vestae* and *Calochortus luteus*, the later endearingly known as Gold Nuggets, before continuing on to the airport and departing during the afternoon of Day 15.

Day 16

Arrive Europe

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