

---

## ***Stop 36. Redwood Forest***

Arrival datetime: Thursday, June 13, 3:00PM  
Sites visited: Redwood National and State Parks  
Accommodations: Whales Inn  
States traveled: California

We traveled through Six Rivers National Forest, which is a consolidation of Trinity National Forest where we were, and a few others from Northern California through Southern Oregon. The dense green woods on the foothills look like northwestern NJ except that the foothills had sharp peaks instead of gradual slopes. Also, the vast majority of trees here are evergreen. We passed

several scenic clear blue man made lakes and the slightly less scenic dams that generated them. We passed rivers that were alternately white rushing and blue calm. Golden yellow, then pink, then white wildflowers flanked the roadways. We stopped often for photos. At Willow Creek, we lunched at Cinnibar Sams, sitting out back and basking in the 80° heat.



*One of many rivers in Six Rivers National Forest.*



*The rocky path up Muir's Peak.*

The basking was not for long. By the time we reached Trinidad it was 54° and the fog was rolling in. It held off long enough for us to appreciate we had checked into an oceanside establishment. Our room looked out on large rocks where we are told seals and other aquatic wildlife play. It was early so we had time to dip into the Redwood Parks. We went to the Visitors Center and saw the video. But it was not the park highlights video to which we had grown accustomed. This was not solely a National Park effort, but one in combination with several state parks in California that also preserved Redwoods. We did learn that the average height of a mature redwood was taller than the Statue of Liberty, and many were taller than a football field is long. But rather than identifying features and interesting destinations in the parks, it talked of the redwoods in general and the current preservation efforts.

Nevertheless, it was easy to find the National Park interpretive trail highlight. It was the Lady Bird Johnson Grove. A mile or so through giant redwood trees with a trail guide that brought out the mature botanists in us. We were soon able to identify a redwood burl, knowing it was on a redwood because redwoods are the only conifers, that term means cone-bearing plants, which have them. We saw how baby trees can sprout from burls as well as from seeds, and how they often sprout from burls when something has happened to the parent tree. Then the parent tree shares its root system with its offspring, allowing it to grow much faster than a sibling grown from seed. Often, there will be a clump of three or four trees growing together, one soon to be deceased parent, and several offspring growing from its burls. Decaying fallen

redwoods also provide opportunity for other plants to grow directly on their surfaces, appearing as large windowsill plantings.

We figured out how to identify the shaggy bark of a redwood in order to distinguish it from the other giant trees in the forest. Cedars and pines in this forest were also so tall we could not see the tops from the forest floor. We also saw the tallest manzanita and rhododendron we had ever seen, as well as the most beautiful wildflowers.



*Wildflowers on the Lady Bird Johnson Trail.*



Yet the atmosphere was cold and dark. Apparently, these giant trees like it that way. The fog actually adds significant precipitation to the yearly total of approximately 100 inches. We took our time meandering through the grove, Jennifer reading the brochure aloud to Michael, and were quite cold by the time we reached the welcomed heated seats of the Cadillac.

Back at the Inn, wine and cookies were waiting for us. We jumped into the hot tub, but not for long. It was only about 98°, nowhere near the 105° to which we had become accustomed. Of course, most of our hot tub experiences had been in natural springs where the innkeepers had to cool the water down, not heat it up.



*Redwoods in the mist at the Lady Bird Johnson Grove.*

We had dinner at the local favorite, Larrupins, where we later learned our breakfast chef cooked dinner. The food was excellent, but the service was atrocious. Patrons who had come in after us had long since left by the time we got our entrée, which was not a complicated order. We figured it might be the first job while in high school for our waiter.

Our room had large windows directly facing the ocean. We awoke to waves crashing on large shiny jagged black rocks that surfaced on the beach and for a half-mile or more out into the ocean. The locals called them sea stacks. Many were shaped kind of like haystacks, which is how we remembered the name. Other than

that, the similarity was only in our heads, the interpretive trails we later saw describing the geological theories on sea stacks did not mention how they got their name. Half asleep staring out of the window, Jennifer thought she saw a whale's tail towards the horizon.

Breakfast was not until 8:30AM, so we got early to walk down to the beach. It was a quarter mile straight down. Where possible, railroad ties banked the slope, forming normal size steps, but for the most part, there were wooden planks strategically placed vertically in the slope to keep the soil from washing away, creating steps of two to three feet in height. There were a few bridge-like

overlooks, and two platforms with chairs for relaxed whale watching. We heard seals and sea lions barking. Hanging from the last viewing platform was a rope with knots to allow one to rappel the last 30 or so feet to the beach. Thankful for the rappel lesson we had gotten at Carlsbad Caverns, and even more thankful Jennifer had found it cold enough to wear gloves, we descended.

The beach was made up of the smoothest prettiest rocks we had seen since the leaving the Atlantic coast. Similarly smooth round rocks grace a beach we often sail to in Port Jefferson Long Island. But the ones in Port Jeff are solid pastels, and these were dark composites. Dark green streaked with marble-like veins, pitch black, speckled gray. One common type was the exact same composition Michael had picked up on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. It was a dull gray with white stripes.

We could easily see sea lions on rocks about 500 yards away without binoculars but could only make out what they were with binoculars. We saw no whales, and Jennifer started to think her whale's tail wake up call was part of a pre-waking dream. However, when we got back, we found the 12 or so guests who were waiting for breakfast to start all aflutter with whale sightings. There were three or four little fishing boats about a half-mile out. These we had seen. Directly in front of them were frolicking whales. Spouts and tails were visible without binoculars, though only really clearly seen with them. So, even though we were all following stern warnings posted in our rooms not to be late for breakfast, the whale sightings made us not mind

that it was the sign-posters who were late.

The previous day at the Visitors Center, we had gotten a permit to drive to the trailhead for the Big Trees trail. We had asked why a permit was necessary and the Ranger mumbled something about crime and this way, it was safe to park your car in that remote location, 7 miles down a dirt road. He gave us the combination to a gate that barred the road. However, the gate was open when we drove in. The drive was beautiful. Redwoods were everywhere. Other conifers, and also plenty of oaks, maples, and other deciduous trees, lined the drive. Wildflowers abounded as well.

The hike itself was like walking through a jungle. The ferns were as tall as we were. The variety of plants in any given view numbered in the 20s. Rustling in the bushes on either side of the path indicated movements of small animals, mostly lizards and chipmunks. Birds fluttered from tree limb to limb and sang repetitive melodies.

Though all the literature says that these trees are not as wide as the Sequoia, their trunks stiff dwarfed us. The heights were such that we could not get a single picture of one whole tree without taking multiple shots to reassemble later with software that creates a panoramic view. There were several other people on the trail, but for the most part, we were alone. The trail went downhill for about a mile into a damp dark alluvial flat. Alluvial, we learned, means soil is deposited by water repeatedly to make up the land. Rich moist earth plus the foggy coastal conditions allow for Redwood growth patterns. Thus, a



*A Redwood Tree on the alluvial flat of the Big Trees Trail.*

signpost at the entrance to the grove told us, the “tallest tree in the world” was in this grove, as well as the “second tallest” and “sixth tallest.” However, none of the trees themselves were labeled, so we could not tell which tree was supposed to be the tallest, second tallest etc. According to the signpost, the tallest was supposed to be towering so far above the rest that if you walked a bit outside of the grove, on the other side of Redwood Creek, you could see it plainly. The streambed and border of the creek was composed of three inch rocks of various shaped and sizes. We walked along the edge, trying to get across, but could not have done it without getting our hiking boots and pants soaked in the cold stream, and taking off our shoes was not an option as the rocks on the bottom of the stream

were not smooth. We got as far out as we could to view the treetops, but did not find a place to stand where one tree seemed to tower above the others.

Later in the car, we read in the park newsletter that Redwoods need lots of moisture and only a little light. If they get too much light, they could dry out. Apparently, logging on a slope near the tallest tree had allowed too much dry air into the area and the tallest tree had been fading since the 1970s. In 1989, tallest tree had actually had an accident where its top fell off. So it was now the former tallest tree. Why they never changed the signposts was beyond us.

Anyway, we sat on a nice bench in the midst of some other very tall trees and had

lunch. Then we ascended. On our way out, we passed a family who claimed to have seen a 500-pound bear on the dirt road near the parking lot. So we hustled back into the safety of the car. We took another dirt road that brought us along the coast. Our destination was Fern Canyon. We stopped when we came across a stream flowing over the road. We did not know how deep the water was and how far it was to the Canyon from where we stopped. We saw that another car had pulled over and parked along the side. We decided to do the same. We assembled ourselves with backpack, camera, and water. Then we saw a small station wagon emerge on the road on the other side of the stream. It barely slowed down, just moved way over to one side of the road and crossed the stream. We looked at each other, deciding at that moment to take the Cadillac for a swim. The road dipped perilously into one other stream before we reached the end.

Fern Canyon was awesome. It was the exact effect that the Nashville Opryland Hotel had been aiming for when it designed its lush waterfalls over foliage-filled cliffs. Except that no imitation could approach the real thing. At least ten different types of ferns sprouted from the walls of thirty to forty foot high cliffs that started at about 50 feet apart and narrowed to 10 as we walked a half mile or so inland. We had seen Fern Grotto in Hawaii and the lushness of its draped ferns pales in comparison. We wondered if they did weddings here. From the top of Fern Canyon, ferns hung not like draperies, but like a fabric warehouse. Layers upon layers of subtly different color greens folded over each other and merged with different species of spore-bearing plants below. Near the bottom of

the cliff, mosses and fungi merged with low leafy crawling plants that finally gave way to a clear stream strewn with smooth round and oval rocks. We picked out way in and over the stream, climbing occasionally over the fallen tree trunks whose roots had been eroded from the edges of the cliffs above. These trunks were covered with new plant life, adding to the perpetually green line of sight. We meandered in the small Canyon for at least an hour.

We had read in the trail guide that the beach we had driven past on the way to the Canyon was an ideal place to gather driftwood. Accustomed to being in National Parks where it is illegal to gather anything, we at first demurred. Then we realized that we were in a State Park. We stopped on the beach to see if they were right. At first we saw only straight flat foot long driftwood along what appeared to be an empty flat beach. But soon, we realized that little tips of



*Michael gathering driftwood.*

branches poking up from the surface of the sand may in fact be hiding intricate patterns of driftwood beneath the surface, and we spread out and started to dig. Michael found a beautiful driftwood redwood burl and Jennifer found a four-branched curved artistic looking piece



*Fern Canyon.*

that rivaled anything they had seen for sale in the local shops.

Back at the Inn, we hurriedly showered in order to be in the back yard for a Pacific sunset. A horizontal cloud the



*Pacific sunset at Trinidad CA.*

length or the horizon and just above it prevented us from seeing the sun drop into the water, but it was a colorful spectacle never the less. With us on the lawn was a fellow guest, Alan Drury, who turned out to be the artist that had populated Jennifer's company's new office building with art. Not his art, but photos they had chosen with the help of a

consultant. Jennifer complimented one series, a set of photos of galaxies. He said NASA did them, all he did was frame them and hang them. However, he did have some of his own art on display and would be happy to show us at breakfast.

At breakfast, in addition to the whale sightings to which we were now accustomed, we were treated to a private showing of Alan Drury's artwork. His specialty is flag colors on Frisbees. That is, he paints geometric patterns on Frisbees in the color of whatever nationality commissioned the work. Then he draws a geometric pattern on a wall and hangs the Frisbees on the wall randomly within the pattern. One photo we saw was of a wall in Nokia's Houston offices. It had one Frisbee painted for each country in which Nokia had offices, that is, in the colors of the flag for that country. The geometric patterns were mostly stars shaped out of diamonds, off center on the Frisbee so that half the star points were incomplete on the edges.

---

Miles traveled: 308  
Departure datetime: Saturday, June 15, 9:30AM  
Departure weather: 55° Cloudy