



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



**Cowell-
Purisima
Trail**
California



Cowell-Purisima Trail

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Just south of Half Moon Bay, the Cowell-Purisima Trail would be a worthy addition to any avid trail user's bucket list. As part of the California Coastal Trail—a network of bicycling and hiking trails that, when complete, will stretch along the coastline for 1,230 miles from Oregon to the Mexican border—this 4.1-mile pathway is possibly one of the most beautiful trails in the state. Originating as private family farmland and developed in 2010, it features stunning, unobstructed views of the Pacific Ocean for most of your journey. The Cowell-Purisima Trail is rich with history. The land that the trail was created on has been a working farm since the mid-1800s. In 1988, the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) acquired the Cowell family ranch with a mission to protect the coastline and allow farming to continue by selling most of the land to local farmers. The trail is now managed by San Mateo

County Parks.

You should probably plan on parking at the northern section of the trail, which maintains a more consistent schedule of opening daily from 8am to 5pm, although the farmers who own the land reserve the right to close the trail at any time for specific purposes related to their farm work, such as moving animals or watering fields.

Although most of the trail is accessible, a small middle section contains steep terrain that would make it extremely difficult for any nonmotorized-wheelchair user to make it through without assistance. It is recommended that wheelchair users park at either end of the trail (north or south) and return to their start point once they reach the challenging terrain.

On your trek from the northern parking lot to quite nearly the water's edge at the southern end, you will travel along a small private farm road and, depending on the time of year, may notice a vast valley of budding Brussels sprouts. As you travel south along the gravel trail, you'll find yourself sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and the Cowell Ranch Farm, as well as other historical family-owned farms. Here, the trail is immersed in an agricultural setting with picturesque farmland and domestic animals dotting the landscape. As the trail begins to parallel the Pacific coastline, enjoy the vistas of elevated rocky cliffs visible for miles.

The most difficult section of the trail lies between mile 1.75 and mile 2, where the grade is steep and the hillside route is so winding that an average bike rider would need to dismount to proceed. Luckily, this section is short enough that it doesn't present a major concern. Over the next mile, you'll follow the coastline again with breathtaking views of the protected beaches that are home to local harbor seals. The last 0.6 mile continues to wind through vegetable fields and cow pastures and along the Pacific until you reach the southern trailhead. The trail extends just a little beyond a turnoff for a parking area and features another sightseeing spot with expansive



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States: California

Counties: San Mateo

Length: 4.1miles

Trail end points: Cowell Ranch Beach (Cabrillo Hwy/CA 1 just south of Dehoff Canyon Rd, Half Moon Bay) to Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trailhead (18501 Cabrillo Hwy S, Half Moon Bay,)

Trail surfaces: Dirt,Gravel

Trail category: Greenway/Non-RT

Trail activities: Bike,Mountain

Parking & Trail Access

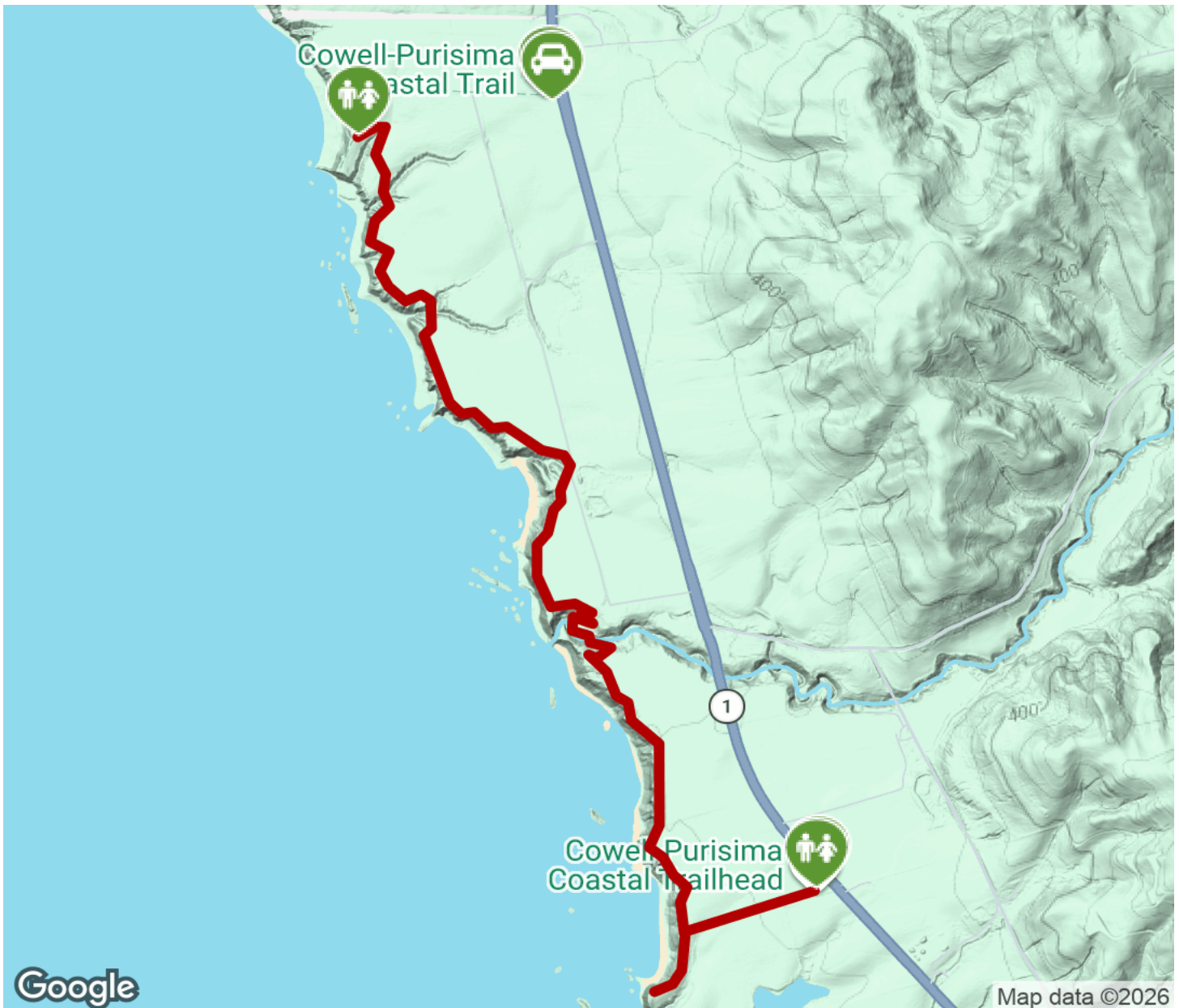
Parking and restrooms are available at both the northern and southern ends of the trail. On the northern end, look for the Cowell Ranch Beach parking area off Highway 1, just south of Dehoff Canyon Road. The southern parking lot is also off Highway 1, just south of Verde Road (18501 Cabrillo Hwy S, Half Moon Bay).

Visit the [TrailLink map](#) for detailed directions.



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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

TrailLink.com