

*Voices* at the *Seashore*

# BACK *in* ACTION

*Point Reyes Summer Camp Welcomes  
First Session of Backpackers*

BY ZOE DUERKSEN-SALM







Summer Camp is back in full swing at Point Reyes National Seashore! PRNSA staff and 24 campers backpacked through the park—meeting new friends and wildlife along the way.

After 20+ miles of grueling, rolling dirt miles through the Point Reyes National Seashore, PRNSA staff expected to greet 24 exhausted campers on the final day of our first Summer Camp backpacking trip. Instead, for the first time since March 2020, the PRNSA office courtyard was filled with youthful laughter and games.

Middle and high schoolers from around the Bay Area—some long-term PRNSA summer campers and some joining for the first time—embarked on a four-day, three-night backpacking trip from Bear

Valley. Split into two groups of 12, 7th-8th graders and 9th-12th graders, campers took two different routes through the park, stopping at numerous campgrounds and popular sites along the way. The middle school group, led by PRNSA's Outreach Manager Brandon Barragan and seasonal backpacking guide Alisa Rose Healy, hiked a total of 15 miles. This group spent their first night at Glen Campground and traveled to Wildcat Campground for the last two nights. The high school group, led by PRNSA's Education Director Biret Adden and seasonal backpacking guide

Julia Saunders, took the longer route totaling to 25.6 miles. This trek took them first to Coast Campground for one night, and then to Glen for the final two nights.

Even though the journey was just as exciting as the destination, the campers did have extra time to explore, backpack-free, in between treks from campsite to campsite. On the second day, both groups hiked down to the beach—the high schoolers got their own day at Santa Maria Beach, and both groups visited Wildcat Beach. For some of the campers, this was their first time ever swimming in the ocean! “Seeing the campers relaxing and having fun was one of the highlights of the trip,” Biret said in reference to the high school group’s visit to Wildcat Beach. Biret went on, “One camper spent most of the hour digging as deep of a hole as they could in the sand. Once the other campers realized what was happening, they ran over and built a sand barrier around the digging camper to protect him from the oncoming waves. It was awesome!”

Similarly, both groups were able to do solo hikes on the Glen Trail—where campers follow a single-track trail, so they can’t get lost, and are spaced far enough apart that they can experience what it sounds and feels like to walk alone through the forest. Many described this as the most uniquely special part of the trek, as it gave them a true glimpse into the backcountry of Point Reyes. “On the solo hike there was complete silence, just the forest and the view. It was breathtaking.” described middle school camper Prairie.

Back at PRNSA headquarters, we had a chance to talk with campers one-on-one about the amazing feat they’d just accomplished. Full of Vitamin D and a little tired, campers smiled as they recounted the events of the previous days—some even still munching on the backpacker chef’s



Adrian

special, tortilla, cheese, salami, and strawberry jam. Even with the appeal of a shower and clean sheets, most didn’t want the experience to end, and were confident that they’d be back next year ready to backpack-up and hike!

### What was it like to backpack in Point Reyes with PRNSA?

“The views out here are amazing, and I met a lot of new friends. It was so calm that you could hear all of the birds. Along the way we were given time to think about anything. That’s basically what I came out here for, so I felt really accomplished.”

–*Prairie, incoming 8th grader*



## What's something you didn't pack, but wish you had?

“Crocks! A must for when you finally reach camp and want to relax.” *-Mia, incoming 10th grader*

### What made you decide to join this adventure?

“My brothers and sisters have hiked with PRNSA Summer Camp before and they had a ton of fun. Even though I've backpacked in Point Reyes before with my family, I wanted to challenge myself by going along with a new group of people.”

*-Carter, incoming 8th grader*

### What was your favorite part of this trip?

“The beach and the ocean were so cool. We got to swim around at Wildcat Beach. That was my first time swimming in the ocean, so that was fun.”

*-Emmet, incoming 8th grader*

### Have you ever backpacked or done anything like this before?

“I've backpacked with my family before—once in the Sierras and once at the edge of Rocky Mountain National Park—and I really enjoy it. I've been to a handful of other PRNSA camps and was excited to try backpacking in Point Reyes!”

*-Laurel, incoming 8th grader*

### What was it like hiking with new people?

“It was fun! When I first got here everyone was really nice but shy because most of us didn't know each other. On the trail everyone was really kind—knowing how to let people pass and slowing down for other campers. The first night, we played games and sat around camp, so people started talking more. After that you felt like you knew everyone a little better and it was really fun!”

*-Greta, incoming 9th grader*



### Did you learn anything cool along the way?

“That's hard because I learned a lot. We were able to go through the fire zone and got to see and learn about forest regrowth as we hiked. I knew that fire was beneficial to some plants, but didn't realize until this trip that some plants, like Bishop Pines actually need fire to survive.”

*-Abby, incoming 10th grader*

### How did you feel when you were out there?

“It felt really good to not have to worry about things like football or what I was going to do throughout the day. This trip helped me let go of worries about time, and I was able to just relax and have a good time.”

*-Angel, incoming 11th grader*