

RETROSPECTIVE **Battles of the Paddle** PG. 50

STANDUP PADDLE MAGAZINE

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GEAR GUIDE
24 PAGES OF
BOARDS, PADDLES
AND MORE

Meandering in *Mendocino*

> Flatwater Freedom on the Rivers and Sea

STANDUP
PADDLE MAGAZINE

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in the
Virgin
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Board &
Body

+ 16 DAYS OF
WHITewater
in the Grandes
of Canyons

Mendocino, California

By Chuck Graham

A dense, dew-choked ceiling hung above the redwood forest canopy, the Big River ambling beneath me toward the icy Pacific of Northern California. My carbon fiber paddle sliced softly through the glassy river, the only breach of silence as I followed the flight of an osprey. Low tide tugged me out of the coastal range and eventually along the breathtaking Mendocino Headlands.



About two hours north of San Francisco, the quiet seaside town of Mendocino is a great escape from city life where time slows to a crawl along serpentine flatwater rivers that flow to gaping mouths on the coast like veins running down a forearm. Its mere 900 residents share Mendocino County with more than 80,000 others savoring redwood forests, America's greenest wine region, a host of microbreweries and liberal views on cannabis. (It is estimated that roughly two-thirds of the economy is based on the cultivation of marijuana.)

Mendocino was one of California's original counties. Following the wreck of the *Frolic* in 1850, Harry Meiggs, a San Francisco lumber dealer, sent Jerome Ford on a salvage mission. While Chinese ginger jars, bolts of silk, camphor and lacquered trunks were nowhere to be found, Ford did discover thick groves of redwood and Douglas fir trees in the region. A year later, Meiggs erected a sawmill at Big River. So began both Mendocino and the lumber industry in Northern California.

The fabled Pacific Coast Highway winds along the Mendocino

coastline, hugging the edge of sea-battered bluffs and crossing rivers cloaked in redwood forests. It's almost as if Mendocino was made for SUPers. Paddle beneath quaint Pacific villages atop rugged cliffs where knobby sea stacks endure ferocious waves. Much of the shoreline is honeycombed with toothy sea grottos in various features, and there are many deep coves protected from the elements providing easy access to rock gardens and surging channels.

Nearly ten percent of Mendocino County consists of water, with a total of ten rivers flowing one way or another. Eight of those reach the ocean, and all are flat water. SUPers can experience the best of both worlds, choosing either the craggy coastline or the serenity of redwood-laden runnels. Black bear, osprey, river otter and mule deer are readily seen along the banks of the Albion, Navarro and Big River. One of the more interesting paddles is upriver on the Albion toward several floating cabins. River otters pop up on the decks, and rows of posts used 160 years ago to collect logs floating down the river are still standing.



Another paddle is an eight-mile roundtrip from Mendocino to the Point Cabrillo Light Station, built in 1909. Weave between giant sea stacks over crystal-clear water while ducking in and out of tranquil coves and dank sea caves. The station stands by itself overlooking the headlands, and on a clear day its flashing light can be seen 15 miles away.

Moody's Organic Coffee Bar
10450 Lansing St.
(707) 937-4843
moodyscoffeebar.com

When the ocean and rivers are a cool 49 degrees, it's nice to know there's a cup of hot chocolate, coffee or latte waiting for you just up the trail. With an adjoining art gallery and internet café, this is a great place to hang out and thaw out.

Stand Up Paddle Mendocino
(707) 937-0700
standuppaddlemendocino.com

Lessons and tours are presented at Van Damme State Beach, just off Pacific Coast Highway, in a deep, tranquil cove hugging one of California's most scenic coastlines. Nearby are many sea caves, narrow channels and rock gardens with curious harbor seals, pigeon guillemots, ospreys and common murrens.

Frankie's Pizza and Ice Cream Parlor
44591 Ukiah St.
(707) 937-2436
frankiesmendocino.com





In the village of Mendocino, Frankie's is the ideal place to pick up a quick nosh or linger over a tasty meal following a paddle. This family-owned and -run eatery serves up pizza, falafel and local ice cream, plus other menu items featuring organic, sustainable, local products. You'll also find espresso drinks, tea, beer and wine, along with live music weekly.

If you choose not to paddle up to the light station, you can enjoy a leisurely stroll there in a tranquil nature reserve, where browsing mule deer and northern harriers frequent the sweeping grasslands of the Mendocino Headlands. The Point Cabrillo Light Station is the beacon of the headlands, and a trip there is a great way to learn about the history of Mendocino. Guided tours are offered each Sunday. If you time your visit for March, you can check out the annual Whale Festival.

Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park
 13800 Point Cabrillo Dr.
 (707) 937-5804
parks.ca.gov

