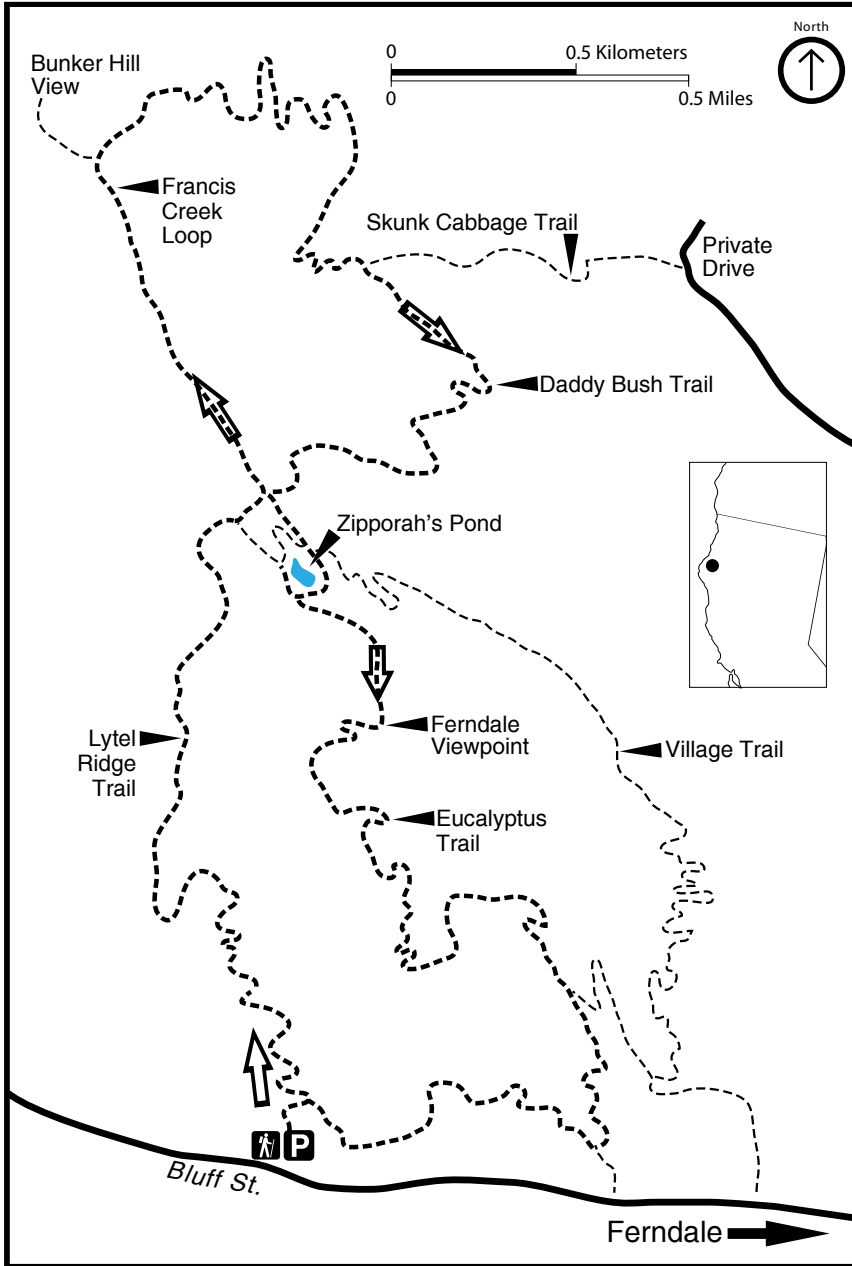


# 2 Russ Park Ferndale, California

Distance: **3 mile loop**

Conifer Count: **5**

Difficulty: **Easy**

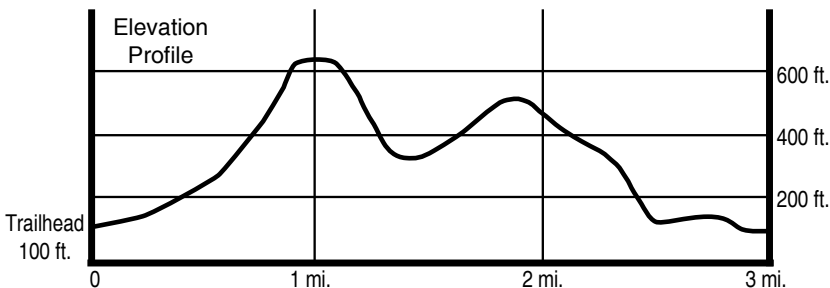


**Hike 2: Russ Park in Ferndale, Ca**

**G**etting there: From Highway 101, 2 miles north of Fortuna, CA, take either exit 691 or 692 to Fernbridge-Ferndale. From Fernbridge travel 5 miles across the Eel River, and its delta, to downtown Ferndale. Take a left on Ocean Ave which soon changes to Bluff Street. After .5 mile the parking lot is on the right.

**W**hy go? To see the southern extent of the Pacific Northwest temperate rainforest. In the hills above Ferndale a noticeable transition begins—the dense forests of the Pacific Northwest give way to the drier forests common in central-coastal California. The Eel River delta is where western hemlocks near, and western redcedars reach, the southern extent of their range. Grand firs begins to flourish here, south of the dense redwood curtain, and Russ Park holds some of the best accessible stands of these trees in northwest California. There are also some elusive western redcedar specimens which are “common” on the North Coast only here and along the lower Mad River.

The Victorian Village of Ferndale is also at your fingertips both before and after the hike. Ferndale is on the National Register of Historic Places and has several restaurants to satiate ones hunger or wet ones whistle. Russ Park is a city park that was donated to Ferndale by Zipporah Russ in 1920. Totaling 105 acres, the park is well preserved by volunteers from the community. The majority of it was originally logged in the 1850's so the forests today is “new” old-growth so to speak—the trees are large. Enjoy, the park is beautiful.



*Ferndale and the Eel River Valley viewed from Russ Park*

The Hike: moderate (2.8 miles round trip)

- 0.0 Parking lot with large Sitka spruce near kiosk. Take the left fork and climb the Lytel Ridge Trail with grand fir, Douglas-fir, and Monterey cypress.
- 0.3 At switchback, western redcedar grows opposite the bench. The ravine below it is lined with grand fir.
- 0.4 Trail levels out and a lone redwood grows.
- 0.5 At junction, take a left at Francis Creek. The right junction will lead to Zipporah's Pond, which I recommend after hiking the Francis Creek-Daddy Bush Trail. This is a good place to compare the Douglas-fir and the grand fir by looking at the bark. Douglas-fir has deeper fissures and wider ridges while grand fir has shallow fissures and narrow ridges; sometimes the bark appears smooth when the trees are young.
- 0.6 Reach a bench at a four-way junction. By the end of the hike you will walk all four forks—stay left now and begin the Francis Creek Loop.
- 0.7 Switchback up through Pacific wax-myrtle (*Myrica californica*), red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*), and evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) with another western redcedar.
- 0.9 Level out—just past Bunker Hill overlook there is a large Douglas-fir surrounded by salal (*Gaultheria shallon*). A walk to the overlook offers a view south—on the highest visible peak stands a Doppler Radar which provides weather information for NOAA on Woodley Island. Along the dry ridge Douglas-fir dominates with an understory of ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) and coastal silk tassel (*Garrya elliptica*) which flourishes as a small trees.
- 1.0 Along ridge the forest becomes dry, particularly along the south-face where California bay (*Umbellularia californica*) is common. As the trail drops, watch for the beautiful fetid adder's tongue (*Scolioopus bigelovii*) in spring.
- 1.4 After a steep descent the trail connects with the Skunk Cabbage Trail. There is an absolute monster of a grand fir just above the junction. At the junction is grows some five-fingered fern (*Adiantum aleuticum*). From the junction, climb the Daddy Bush Trail back toward Zipporah's Pond.
- 1.6 The forest cools and becomes denser near a bench under a beautiful western redcedar.
- 1.7 Just below the junction, look for enormous Douglas-fir. From the junction, take the left toward Zipporah's Pond.
- 1.8 Reach the pond. Take a moment to sit quietly on the bench at the pond's edge and wait for gray jays (*Perisoreus canadensis*). According to David Fix, a co-author of the Breeding Bird Atlas of Humboldt County, this is one of the most reliable places in the state to spot this wraith of pure coniferous forests—here at the southwestern extent of their range. The redwoods growing here were probably planted by Zipporah many years ago, but their presence creates a feeling that one is standing in a unique microclimate. Leave the pond via the Eucalyptus trail.
- 1.9 Reach Ferndale Viewpoint with views over the town to the Pacific Ocean beyond the mouth of the Eel River.
- 2.1 Drop down staircase and cross small creeklet.
- 2.2 Right at junction to return to parking area.
- 2.3 Kiosk at Eucalyptus trailhead.
- 2.4 Pass through a redwood grove planted by Russ family above their farm.
- 2.5 Near trailhead passing giant Sitka spruce.