

# The Coast is Clear

Sonja Englert

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The Little River airport had long been on my list of places to visit. The main problem was its location on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, which is frequently foggy. It also is a bit further away than my other destinations for day trips. This weekend it finally worked out, with no fog in the morning and great weather along the whole route.

I want to share some pictures of my flight in Caro 1. It took almost two hours to get to Little River, which is a few miles south of Mendocino. I first crossed the central valley westbound past Sacramento, then I climbed a bit more to clear the coastal mountains.



Just past Lake Beryessa, looking south

I flew by Clear Lake and past Ukiah, where the airport is surrounded by the town on three sides.



Ukiah in the distance

Once I reached the last few ridges before the sea, the vegetation changed dramatically. Where before it had been dry with few, widely spaced trees and fields and pastures in the valleys, now the mountains were covered with dark green dense growth of tall trees.



The coastal forest

The fog had retreated from the coast line and the airport, situated in a clearing on a plateau, was easy to spot.





Little River airport (right), at 500 ft above the sea.



Just off the coast, descending towards pattern altitude, with the airport in the background



Little River, looking northeast

It was quite busy on the frequency and around the airport, after I had landed, several other airplanes arrived, also making use of the clear weather.



On the ground, with Caro 1 which drew some interested looks



I met an older couple who like me was planning to go hiking. They had been here before and knew the area. I joined them so that they could show me the start of the trail to a state park called “Pygmy Forest Trail”. While we walked the less than a mile to the trail, we talked a bit. They had flown in from Auburn in their RV-6 and remembered that we had met before. I think the only reason they were able to remember this was the fact that they had seen Caro before. It was in 2016, in Minnesota on my first Oshkosh trip in Caro, where we all got stuck in weather at the Albert Lea airport. Small world.

The Van Damme State Park consists of almost 2000 acres of beach and upland on the Mendocino Coast. The park features the lush Fern Canyon scenic trail system; the Pygmy Forest where mature, cone-bearing cypress and pine trees stand six inches to eight feet tall, and the bog, or Cabbage Patch, where skunk cabbage grows in abundance. The park's ten miles of trail go along the fern-carpeted canyon of Little River. The trail started a board walk through the Pygmy Forest, where trees only grew to a fraction of their normal height due to the acidic soil low in nutrients.



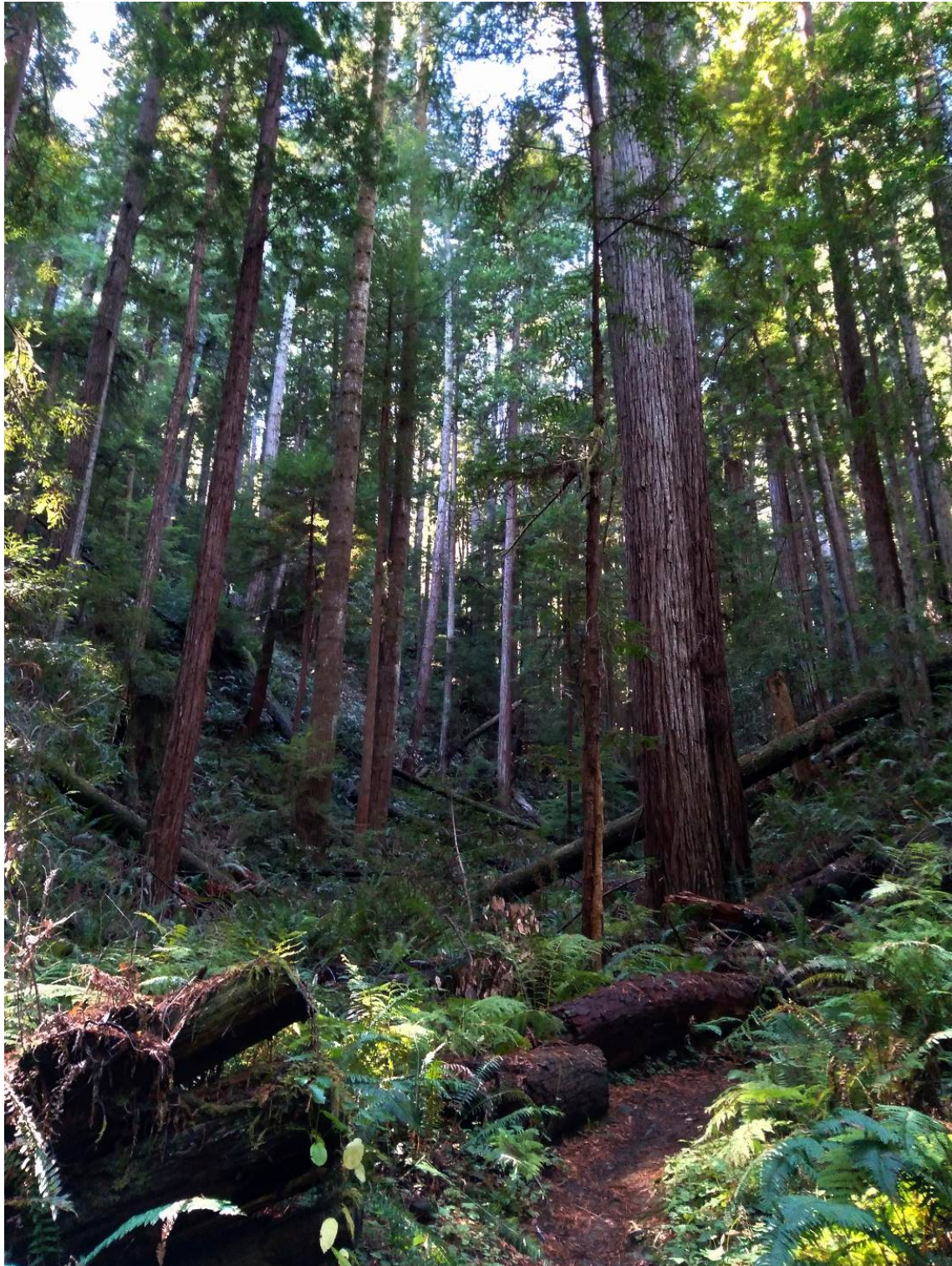
I found bushes there with ripe Huckleberries, which almost look and taste like blueberries. But these bushes grew 8 ft tall here. The land here had risen successively from the sea, every 100,000 years or so there is another push, and a new terrace is created and colonized by the trees.

Where the board walk ended, the trail continued towards the edge of the ridge, where it descended down towards the creek.



This was the most beautiful and spectacular part, the redwood forest. There is nothing “pygmy” about these trees, they look to be about 100 ft tall. It was shady, cool and damp, and standing besides the columns of their trunks, I felt like standing in a cathedral.

Except for the trail itself, the whole area is left alone, pure nature.





These are “young” trees, with 2-4 ft diameter.







The real giants don't exist anymore. Apparently a fire (hundreds of years ago?) killed this tree, only the stumps remain, still coated with charcoal inside.









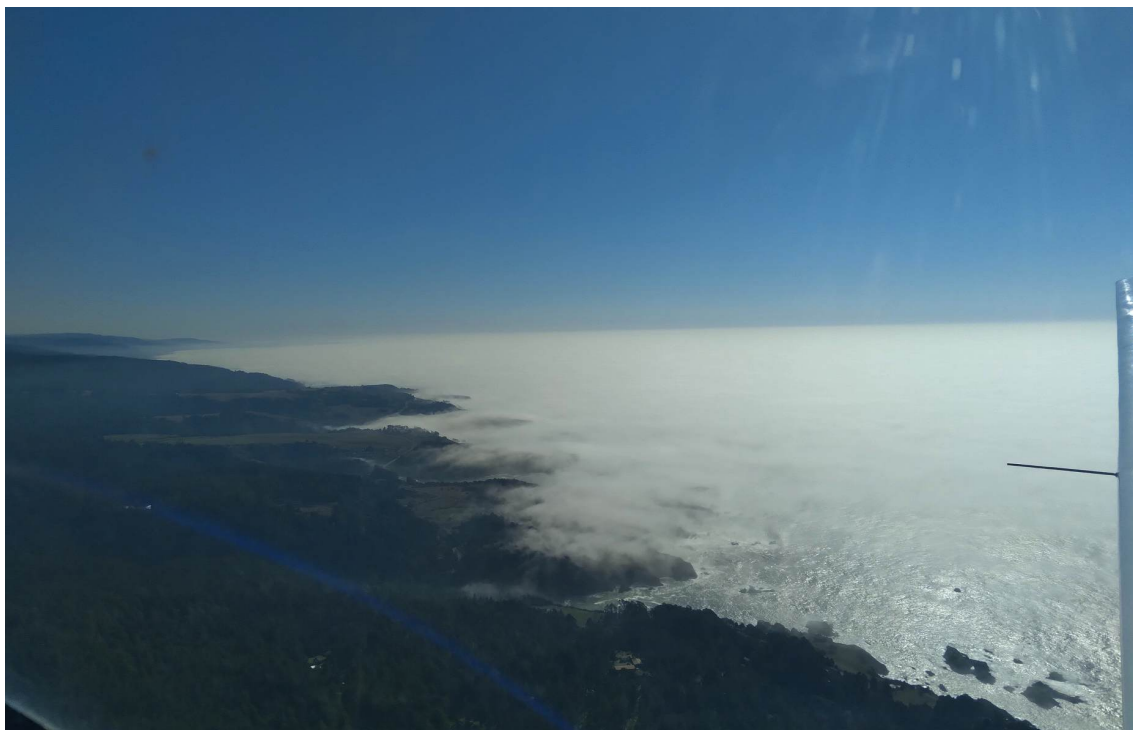
I reached the creek at the bottom and walked parallel to it for a mile before ascending back onto dry ground and sunshine.





Back at the airport





After takeoff I realized that the fog was pushing inland again and had already reached the coastline. Time to leave.

It was a great experience and 4 hours total flight time. It is worth another visit.