April 27, 2003

Ocean views and other wonders of Bay Area campsites

Can you imagine waking up in your sleeping bag, poking your head out your tent and being greeted by a spectacular waterfront beach, the water lapping gently at the shore.

Then hearing a light scratching noise, quickly turning to scan the surrounding landscape, and spotting a dozen elk just 40 yards off, pawing at the ground, nibbling at fresh greenery.

Can you imagine doing this at a campsite in the Bay Area?

This is no dream. There's a place where fantasies like this come true. This scene can happen virtually any morning at the campsites along the west shore of Tomales Bay at Point Reyes National Seashore, where there are a series of boat-in camps set along sandy coves, ideal to reach by kayak or canoe.

Of the 50 campgrounds in the Bay Area, this is the best of them. Other camps feature redwood forests, backpacking trail sites, ocean bluffs, stunning views, launch points for boating, and hidden spots within eyeshot of San Francisco. In most cases, reservations are required.

For the coming spring and summer season, here are my ratings:

1. Tomales Bay boat-in, Point Reyes National Seashore: There are 20 dispersed campsites nestled along the shore of Tomales Bay, from Tomales Point on south to just north of Indian Beach (at Tomales Bay State Park). This setting is gorgeous and quiet, and with Inverness Ridge to the west, sheltered from coastal winds. Opportunities for sea kayaking and canoeing are unparalleled in the region. Boaters must bring portable toilets. (415) 663-8054.

2. Kirby Cove, Marin Headlands: This is a drop-dead beautiful campground set amid small grove of eucalyptus and cypress. It is small and hidden, with space for just four tents, with a jaw-dropping view of the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Headlands and

Tom Stienstra
Outdoors

7. Butano walk-in, Butano State Park: The reward here is a campsite secluded in dense redwoods in the coastal Santa Cruz Mountains, set on the threshold of excellent hiking. Very short walks are required to the best sites. (800) 444-7275.

8. Steep Ravine, Mount Tamalpais State Park: Ten primitive cabins are set on a bluff at Rocky Point, overlooking the ocean. That is why this is the most popular campsite in California, with reservations cleaned out within 10 minutes on the first day of each month. An additional half-dozen walk-in sites are exposed to coastal winds. (800) 444-7275.

9. Del Valle Regional Park: This is the best drive-to family campground in the Bay Area. The park features a recreation lake, boat ramp, boat rentals, swimming, fishing, biking and hiking and a wilderness trailhead. (510) 562-2267.

10. Snug Harbor, Sacramento River Delta: The best privately operated park by far in the Bay Area. The place sparkles and features park-model cabins, RV and tent campsites, boat launch, docks, and waterfront sites, with boat rentals available nearby. (916) 775-1455.

Others Bay Area campgrounds of significant note:

Marin: Sky Camp, Coast Camp and Glen Camp at Point Reyes National Seashore, (415) 663-8054; Samu...
Tim Allen Enjoys Delta

Tim Allen and friends stayed at Snug Harbor last weekend, touring around the delta in their very fast boat, and joining in the Poker Run out of Tower Park. They also visited many local restaurants, to get a sense of the character of the delta. Pictured are Tim Allen (in hat, back center) and his friend Bret Gregory to his left. Snug Harbor staff include Spencer, Gene Turman (with her daughter Carley), Adrienne and Vicki, along with Snug Harbor owner Nicky Sward along the bottom of photo.

Allen enjoyed his peace and quiet at Snug Harbor, and on Sunday was very accommodating to some of the campers, even signing a large RV with his name and words like "Buzz Lightyear" and words from his "Christmas movies".

Tim's friend Bret Gregory is very familiar with the Delta, having grown up summers in the delta at his parents vacation home at Oakley Marina.
by Sarah Krupp

A MENTIFER GLASS--adventurous traveler can whatever the heart craves in delta, from camping and hide-and-seek resorts and historical areas to quirky restaurants in island of hedonism.

Grand Island Mansion

Where: Take Highway 4 the Antioch toll bridge, north turns into Highway 160, yde, turn left onto County 720. When it dead-ends at river, turn right onto Grandad Road. (Or just fly there! mansion has a helipad.)

Why: This opulent Italian fashion-style villa in Walnut is was built in 1917 for Louis Healy, a native of San Francisco, and his wife, Audrey. The Lubin of the Wees Lubin department stores. mansion is on an 800-acre ch and is surrounded by man red vineyards. It offers elegant course meals, wine tastings, and camel riding excursions and duck fishing trips.

The 16-room mansion has a grand hall, bowling lane and elegant ballroom. The grounds include a tennis court, basketball court, pool, Jacuzzi, and a gym with facilities. For a taste of the Grand Mansion, make reservations for its Sunday champagne brunch.

Contact: 916-775-1705 or www.grandislandmansion.com.

Lost Isle Bar & Resort

Where: The bar is at Light 24 n the San Joaquin River.

Why: Some call it Shamrock, others an island. The light-colored buildings, palm trees, outdoor bar and volleyball court of Lost Isle are like a tropical paradise rising from the Delta. Although it’s hard to have quieted down in past few years, the island, which is open Friday through Sundays and accessible only to those 21 and older, still promises a good time. It’s a gold place for family activities including biking and fishing.

Contact: 916-775-1455 or www.lostisland.com.

Snug Harbor

Where: Take Highway 12 to Rio Vista and hop on the ferry to Ryer Island, home of Snug Harbor. For landlubbers coming from Sacramento, get on Jefferson Boulevard (Highway 80), turn right on Courtland, and follow to Miners Slough bridge.

Why: Clustered on the waterfront of Ryer Island is a family-orientated resort with water- front wooden cabins and recreational vehicle sites as well as tent camping. The island offers sandy beaches and bike riding, and is, of course, the perfect site to launch into the Delta for whatever suits the fancy. The bass fishing is good in the fall. During the summer, the warm Delta water is inviting for waterskiing, sailing, tubing and windsurfing.

Contact: 916-775-1455 or www.snugharbor.net.

Delta Ferries

Where: For free ferry rides to Ryer Island, take Highway 12 to Rio Vista. Just west of the entrance to the Rio Vista bridge, take the ramp that leads you to downtown. Go north along the west levee road of the Sacramento River to the ferry ramp.

COZY AND FUN: Ryer Island's Snug Harbor is the place to go for family-type activities including biking, camping and fishing.

Contact: 916-775-1455 or www.snugharbor.net.