

# Santa Cruz Top 5 Geologic Must-Sees!



**SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM**  
of natural history



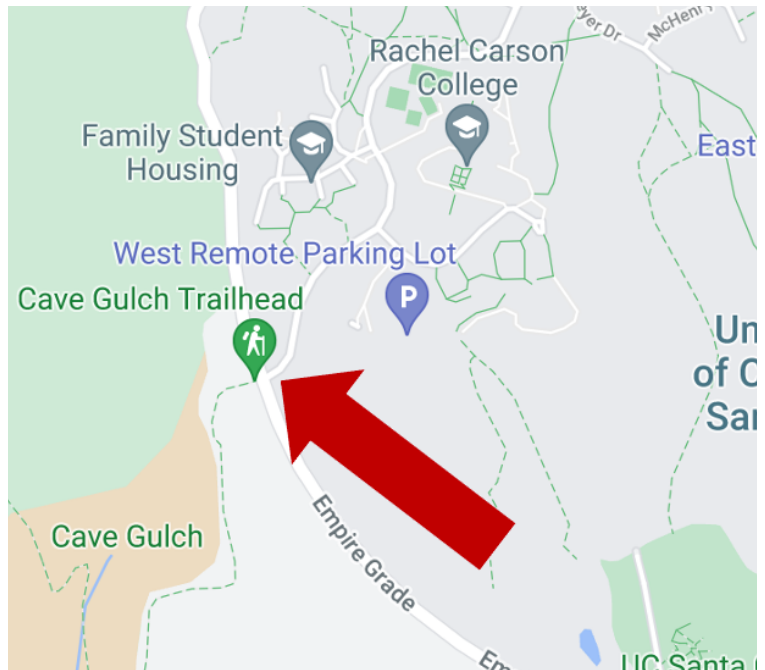
## Beaches below Depot Hill in Capitola

The best way to find fossils in the Purisima Formation is at low tide on the beaches below Depot Hill in Capitola, between Capitola Beach and New Brighton Beach. Look to the cliff walls and through boulders and smaller rocks littering the sandy shore and note that winter storms can expose new or known fossils!

## Empire Cave on UCSC Campus

The caves of Santa Cruz are called solutional caves because they form when groundwater dissolves pathways through rock. Rainwater and groundwater carry dissolved carbonic acid and organic acids that are pulled out of the soil as water percolates down from the surface. As rainwater and groundwater slowly dissolve their way through the marble bedrock over thousands to millions of years little cracks turn into large caves.

You can explore Empire Cave on the west side of UC Santa Cruz Campus off Empire Grade Road.



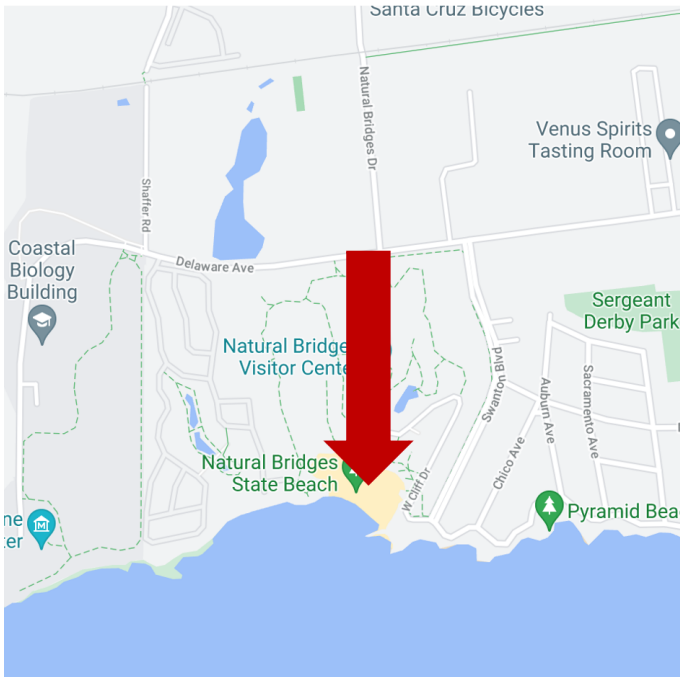
## Santa Cruz Sandhills at Henry Cowell State Park

The Graham Hill Road entrance provides access to a sandhill habitat overlook. This habitat is unique to the Santa Cruz mountains and used to be a popular foraging ground for fossil hunters searching for prehistoric shark teeth and sand dollars, however this activity is no longer legally allowed by the park. The sand in these hills is a result of longer term uplift from the ocean floor over millions of years! This habitat also hosts a variety of endemic species.



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## Natural Bridges State Park

Natural bridges or arches often form in narrow peninsulas that stick out from shore. Waves crash into the rock, bend around the tip and focus energy on both sides, sometimes forming caves that may meet in the middle. In the early 1900s, there were three connected arches (e.g. a bridge) in this location, but two have since eroded away, leaving what is now technically an arch made of the Santa Cruz Mudstone.

Use the Museum's [Walking Tour of West Cliff](#) to explore other geologic formations within walking distance!



## Swift Street Outcrop

The Swift Street outcrop contains over 9 million years worth of geologic history off the coast of Santa Cruz. Familiar formations found at Swift Street include the Purisima sandstone and the Santa Cruz mudstone, along with younger beach deposits that make up the top layer of the outcrop. Each of these layers are separated by sharp erosional contacts (geologists call these disconformities) that represent missing time and material in the rock record.

Use the Museum's [Guide to the Swift Street](#) outcrop to learn more about this!

