

Team Stone: Fort Bragg & Westport

POST-TRIP FIELD GUIDE · REPEAT-TRIP EDITION

Roads · water · family rhythm · weather · communications · fallback plans

The useful correction from this trip: the Mendocino coast is a spectacular travel environment, but warm inland water is the better default for a family swimming day. This guide turns what actually worked, what required verification, and what should be handled differently next time into a reusable Team Stone plan.

1. The one-sentence doctrine

One major outing per day; reserve the things that punish spontaneity; keep one unprogrammed camp-and-water day; verify water, surf, roads and venue hours on the day; carry communications and clothing for the conditions you may get, not merely the forecast you liked.

2. Water reality

Pomo Swim Beach / Lake Mendocino: First-choice family swimming option when current access, water-quality and weather conditions are acceptable. Treat this as the planned swim day rather than improvising along the coast.

Blue Lakes: Possible call-ahead/private-day-use option. Verify actual access before leaving the corridor; do not build a day around remembered access rules.

Clear Lake: Never improvise swimming without current bacterial and harmful-algal-bloom information. If advisories, visible scum or uncertainty are present, move on.

Russian Gulch: Dramatic and useful for coastal exploration, but very cold/swift water, surge and rogue-wave risk make casual family swimming a poor default. Never assume continuous lifeguard coverage.

Van Damme: Better structured for supervised paddling/diving when conditions and operator rules permit. Still a cold-water marine environment.

Westport-Union Landing: Think surf, scenery and shoreline time. Water in the low-50s Fahrenheit and active surge are not an invitation to convert a beach stop into an unplanned swim.

NO-GO TRIGGERS: posted advisory, visible scum, high surf, sneaker-wave warning, poor visibility, unclear legal access, or a plan whose safety margin consists mostly of “we’ll be careful.”

3. Road west: make the corridor part of the trip

Primary corridor: I-5 → Highway 20 → Clear Lake / Ukiah / Willits / Laytonville → Branscomb Road → Westport.

Laytonville rule: Handle fuel, food, restroom and last easy purchases before Branscomb Road. The next segment is for driving, not discovering which family member forgot lunch.

Branscomb Road: Check Caltrans QuickMap and county closure information before committing. Fog, rain, debris, wildlife and road condition change the useful speed and sight distance quickly.

Stops: Use obvious legal pullouts only. A beautiful view does not grant a shoulder additional width.

Offline layer: Keep downloaded/offline maps and the communications sheet available before leaving reliable service.

4. Family rhythm

One major outing per day: It leaves enough time for camp, wandering, beach weather, food delays and children to remain people rather than itinerary cargo.

Reserve the scarce things: Railbikes and a particular Westport dinner are examples. Make the reservation, then stop scheduling every hour around it.

Keep one unprogrammed day: A camp-and-water day can become the best part of the trip precisely because it has room to react to weather and energy.

Rain backup: Noyo Center plus Princess Seafood or Casa del Sol makes a useful harbor-centered sequence when the coast decides the outdoor plan was presumptuous.

Pools: Confirm hotel-pool access and any public-pool hours immediately before relying on them. Seasonal hours age badly.

5. Water / coast kit

- PFDs appropriate to the activity and child
- Water shoes
- Warm layer for every swimmer/paddler
- Dry bags / waterproof phone protection
- Towels and dry change of clothes where they can actually be reached
- Sun protection even when the marine layer makes the sun look theoretical

6. Communications: overlapping layers

Phones and normal data remain first-line where available. Amateur radio, APRS, Winlink, simple local references, chargers and offline maps add continuity rather than pretending to replace one another.

Before departure: Update offline maps; charge phones/radios/battery packs; verify repeaters/packet destinations if they matter to the route; print or save the operating quick reference.

On the road: Use APRS/location tools as orientation layers where appropriate, not as a private family logistics feed. Keep direct family coordination simple.

At camp / coast: Expect coverage holes. Decide meeting points and return times before separating.

Emergency: Use the service that works and matches the situation. The plan is successful when nobody cares which technology won.

7. Day-of verification list

- ☐ Caltrans QuickMap / local closure status
- ☐ National Weather Service forecast and wind
- ☐ Surf / sneaker-wave / beach hazard statement
- ☐ Tides for coastal activity
- ☐ Current HAB / bacterial water-quality information for intended inland swim
- ☐ Actual venue hours and reservation status
- ☐ Fuel / charging plan
- ☐ Family meeting point and communications check

8. Useful repeat-trip circuit

Westport / camp → coast or reserved outing → Noyo Harbor / Fort Bragg food and indoor fallback → one inland-water day when conditions support it. The point is not to repeat the same trip every time. The point is to know which components are dependable enough to rotate rather than rediscover.

Live references

[Team Stone web guide](#)

[Team Stone Doctrine](#)

[K6RCS field systems](#)

[Caltrans QuickMap](#)

[National Weather Service](#)

[California HAB reports / information](#)

Team Stone · Know the road. Keep the signal. Carry the people. · Updated August 2026