

THE DRIVE

By Dana Rebmann



Roving the Coast

A tent-topped Land Rover offers the key to a comfortable California camping trip

THE ROUTE



The idea of camping may be romantic, but sleeping under the stars takes work. In search of a slightly cushier outdoors experience, I decide to make for the Sonoma Coast in a rented tent-topped Land Rover from **Bohemian Highway Travel Co.**

When I pick up the black 1987 Land Rover Defender 110 at Bohemian Highway's HQ in downtown Sonoma, I feel both strangely cool and undeniably intimidated. The Defender's sharp lines have earned it cult status, and the rooftop tent makes the indestructible rig even more prominent. Yet, when I step up into the cab, I find I'm unprepared for the sheer size of the vehicle; the steering wheel is enormous! As I find my grip, a

passing driver offers a reassuring honk and a thumbs-up.

In less than an hour, I'm rolling through the town of Bodega, made famous by Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, on the way to **Bodega Head**. When I arrive at the small, rocky peninsula, it's buzzing with shutterbugs and sightseers watching the spouts of migrating gray whales pop from the Pacific.

Speed Racer I am not, as I continue north on Highway 1. The striking sea on my left is swallowed by fog by the time I make it to **Shell Beach**, just south of the Russian River and Jenner. Strong swells prevent tide-pooling, but I have the sand to myself, and after a few minutes the skies miraculously clear.



Opposite page: a Land Rover Defender traverses Sonoma County's rolling hills; this page, from left: sunset views from Bodega Head; Bodega's St. Teresa of Avila Church, which appeared in Hitchcock's *The Birds*



I could stay here all day, but I've got a good reason to get back behind the wheel: an appointment at the scenic **Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery**. Seated on the deck overlooking the coastline, I sip a rare California-grown pinotage (a fruit-forward nod to the South African roots of owners Lester and Linda Schwartz) while watching a charm of hummingbirds zoom around climbing vines of morning glories and clematis. Just one glass, though, as I've to get on the road again.

Daylight is fading as I arrive at the campground at **Stillwater Cove Regional Park**, but the rooftop tent pops up with ease—no flashlight necessary. I packed a sleeping bag and pillow, but it turns out the Defender is a supply closet on wheels. The fire-engine-red camping lantern I find inside helps set a glowing evening mood as I simmer pozole on the camping stove. I dig a chocolate bar out of the cooler, anticipating the perfect s'more, and then stretch out in the comfortably padded California King-size tent space.

The next morning, after a simple picnic breakfast of fruit and yogurt, I drop the tent and hit the road again. **Stump Beach** is littered with clever driftwood forts, but I keep to the blufftop trail to soak in the ocean views from up high.

I've worked up an appetite by the time I get back to the car, but the lunch I packed is buried in the back of the Rover. That gives me an excuse, however, to keep on up the road and pick up a Twofish Baking calzone from **Stewarts Point Store**. I take my treat up to **Black Point Beach**, where I'm immediately thankful for extra napkins, as warm ricotta drips from the dough with each bite.

There's one more stop I want to make. I take the curves along Highway 1 slowly, so as not to miss the turn for **Sea Ranch Chapel**. Located on the east side of the

road, the pint-size, non-denominational worship space, which opened in 1985, looks like an elvish hideaway, its whimsical curved structure blending gracefully into the surroundings.

A chill has taken hold by the time I reach the campground at **Gualala Point Regional Park**, so I decide to turn in early. The brilliant stars in the night sky make it hard to close my eyes, but the thing about a camping trip—even one so well appointed—is that you always earn your night's rest. *\$325 per night, including camping equipment, bohohwy.com*

THE CAR

2021 Land Rover Defender 110

Love the rugged look of a vintage Defender but want a modern driving experience? Last year, Jaguar Land Rover reintroduced the iconic 4x4, which went out of production in 2016 following a

68-year run. While it's still designed for adventure (note the ultrasonic sensors that monitor depth when fording water), the new version is equally fun to drive on pavement, thanks to a fully independent suspension and a turbocharged, four-cylinder engine that pumps out 296 horsepower. (Zero to 60 in 7.7 seconds? Astounding for a beast that tips the scales at nearly 6,000 pounds ... and the six-cylinder SE model is even faster.) Land Rover even updated the iconic blocky body, adding some ever-so-slight curves to the design. One thing's for certain: The Defender is back on the watch. *From \$50,500, landroverusa.com*



Courtesy of Bohemian Highway Travel Co. (hills); Glenn Lee Robinson (sunset); Dana Reimann (church, tent top); Triggershoots LTD (new Defender)