

THINGS TO DO > TRAVEL • News

Riding the Mushroom Train for fungi, fine wine and forest conservation

A beloved Mendocino railroad, once built to haul logged redwoods, now funnels fun into fundraising for coastal forest protection



Passengers enjoy a scenic journey aboard the Skunk Train, winding through towering redwoods along the historic California Western Railroad line. (Photo by Clara Shook)



By **AUDREY T. WILLIAMS, CORRESPONDENT**

PUBLISHED: November 13, 2025 at 8:00 AM PST

Mendocino County is what happens when the Pacific Ocean decides it wants to date a rainforest. Once a year, Mendocino Area Parks Association (MendoParks), invites folks to join them on the Mushroom Train, a journey into the redwoods to partake in artisanal cocktails and locally foraged culinary delights, all in the name of fun and fundraising.

The Mushroom Train is just one offering from the Fort Bragg-based Skunk Train depot. This post-logging railroad, once a conveyor belt for redwood extraction, now runs a very different kind of harvest: foodie-level bites, foraged fungi, fine wines and fundraising.

The annual Mushroom Train makes its run each November as one of MendoParks' largest fundraising events. The nonprofit receives no tax dollars yet manages education, stewardship and community programming across Mendocino Coast state parks. Every ticket is a direct donation to redwoods, trail access and the future of this ecological corridor.



Travelers mingle on the open-air car, savoring the fresh forest air and lively atmosphere of the Mushroom Train. (Photo by Clara Shook)

All aboard

The morning of the event the depot hums with pre-departure anticipation. It's a 21+ event. People flash their IDs, sip warm cider or coffee and pull their puffy jackets tighter against the morning chill. For a few more dollars, the presidential class car, new for 2025, is a plush little jewel box complete with emerald velvet tufted seats, vintage radio speakers at each table and, this year, Tamar Kaye and Crispin Cain of Mendocino Spirits pouring its Low Gap California Whiskey.

Someone asks, "Is bourbon an acquired taste?," and Cain grins. "Bourbon is ... a commitment," he says. The car erupts in laughter, and everyone accepts it.

The ride into the reds

The train runs parallel to Pudding Creek, rattling along a wooden trestle, then the canopy closes in. We glide into second-growth redwoods, descendants of the giants felled for profit in the early 20th century.

This railroad used to export forests. Now, it transports the people who protect them.

The second pour: Kaye and Cain share tastes of their distillery's limited-edition candy-cap mushroom liqueur, and the whole car warms with the smells of butterscotch and maple.

Glen Blair Bar: A forest party with a purpose



Guests prepare their own snacks at DIY s'more and hot dog stations at the large campfire pits outside the Glen Blair Bar pavilion. (Photo by Clara Shook)

Twenty minutes later, we disembark at Glen Blair Junction and enter “Glen Blair Bar,” a large open-air pavilion filled on this day with mushroom-infused light bites, local craft wines and spirits, and vendors selling mushroom-themed art and accessories.

Live music from three local bands starts soon after arrival. The opening act is the Sid Hillman band, fronted by the executive director of MendoParks himself. Next, we are treated to the soulful sounds of 18-year-old guitar virtuoso Bella Rayne & friends, followed by instrumental world fusion band The Runabout.

In the clearing next to the pavilion are three large campfire rings adjacent to DIY s'more and hot dog stations, for the kid in you. This is an adult play date after all.

Guests cluster around the mushroom education and identification table as Eric Schramm points to a cluster of California golden chanterelles and a 1.5-pound porcini he found the previous day.

Next, we have the wine education table, led by Cory Lester of Bee Hunter Wines, who shares tastes of its red and white varieties from its Boonville tasting room.



Locally foraged mushrooms like Candy Cap and Morel invite guests to explore the diverse flavors of Mendocino County's forest bounty. (Photo by Clara Shook)

Optional experiences

An hour into the festivities, the first round of the forest bathing tour fans out into the woods, guided by Certified Forest Bathing Guide Megan Carson, who talks about this Japanese practice known as shinrin-yoku as medicine. With slower breathing and reduced stress hormones, it helps the body remember its somatic connection to nature.

Leslie Krongold of Leslie's Accessible Walks, known for her accessibility advocacy, maneuvers the well-maintained gravel path in her motorized chair expertly, proof that with intention, more people can access wild beauty.

Dance, fire, cold air, warm faces

As the afternoon deepens, DJ Beetroot back on the train drops vintage dance tracks. People dance around the wooden embarkment platform in fleece and beanies. The cold makes the warmth from the round campfire pits more delicious.

In this redwood clearing, there's no pretense. This fundraiser feels like gratitude in motion.

How to do this trip right



A guest dressed in festive mushroom-themed attire joins fellow riders for the whimsical redwood experience. (Photo by Clara Shook)

From San Francisco, Mendocino is 3-4 hours north. Highway 1 is scenic but can be a bit twisty to maneuver in the dark. Highway 101 to Highway 20 is faster, less nausea-inducing. Savvy visitors arrive Friday night.

North Cliff Hotel in Noyo Harbor offers two-person jetted tubs with ocean views and fireplaces in every room.

Mendocino folks treat the Mushroom Train like a sacred annual ritual. Tickets sell out early.

Mendocino isn't selling novelty here — it's modeling a future: post-extraction, post-burnout, post-disposable culture. We're not just sipping liqueur under the redwoods. We're investing in the

comeback of a coastline long used, logged and left for dead. Growing up near the timber plantations, wetland marshes and barrier islands of North Carolina, I've seen land survive a lot — except human indifference when conservation is needed. Up here, on this quirky little train powered by bourbon, mushrooms and communal joy, the opposite is happening. This is what Northern California looks like when people decide the forest deserves more than nostalgia.

This isn't tourism.

It's stewardship disguised as a party, and this is your invitation.



Guests enjoy the open-air car's perfect view as the train snakes its way through the lush Mendocino redwoods. (Photo by Clara Shook)

Details: If you want to take the Mushroom Train, you'll have to wait to buy advance tickets for next year's MendoParks fundraiser. But adults can still ride the Skunk Train to Glen Blair Bar or on select weekends this year (\$59.95). The family-friendly Pudding Creek Express ride (\$54.95-\$295) with games, snacks and redwood exploration is available year-round, and "Mr. Skunk's Giant Christmas Tree and Workshop" holiday ride (\$85.45-\$113.95), featuring seasonal treats and decor, runs Nov. 22-Dec. 31. For tickets, visit skunktrain.com

Mendocino County: If you go

Bee Hunter Wines: Open 11 a.m.-5 p.m. daily, 14077 CA-128, Boonville, 707-357-0598; beehunterwine.com

Mendocino Spirits: Open noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 1110 Bel Arbres Road #D, Redwood Valley, 707-485-2068; mendocinospirits.com

Schnaubelt Distillery: Open 1 p.m.-7 p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays and 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Fridays-Sundays, 32425 N. Harbor Drive, Fort Bragg, 707-489-4805; schnaubeltdistillery.com

North Cliff Hotel: 1005 S. Main St., Fort Bragg, 707-962-2500; northcliffhotel.net

MendoParks: Find parks, visitor centers, programs and events at mendoparks.org

Visit Mendocino County: For more inspiration for your trip, visit visitmendocino.com



Report an error
Policies and Standards |
Contact Us

2025 > November > 13