

A black and white photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, there are large, dark, jagged rocks partially submerged in the water. The water is turbulent, with white foam from breaking waves visible. In the background, the ocean stretches to the horizon under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is dramatic and powerful.

Beauty Will Save the World

Volume IV: Thirty-Eight Photographs of the Sonoma Coast

Stephen S. Ashley

2019

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FRONTISPIECE: *Ocean Surf No. 2, Sonoma Coast, 2018*

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CALIFORNIA STATE ROUTE 1 traverses California's Sonoma Coast from Bodega Bay in the south to the Gualala River in the north. Travelers along this 49-mile stretch encounter some of the world's most beautiful land and seascapes. The Pacific Ocean's California Current brings cold water from the Gulf of Alaska to California's northern shores, and with the cold water come mild summers and winters and frequent fog and low clouds. The coastal hills, shrouded in redwood trees, descend to coastal terraces with steep bluffs above the ocean. Winter storms, wind, water, and tectonic shifts along the San Andreas Fault combined to carve giant rock formations where the land meets the sea. The interaction of the land, sea, and weather arouse in the visitor a medley of sensations. From the cliffs one can spy seals, sea lions, migrating whales, and sea birds. The meadows abound with lupine, thistles, and irises, and deer, turkeys, and wild pigs.

In this volume I continue the mission I described in Volume I, to save the world by attempting with each photograph to scoop up a small piece of truth and present it as a living force, as Solzhenitsyn said. Artists, according to Pope John Paul II, should create beauty that stirs in us the wonder that arouses a yearning to meet the future: "Thanks to this enthusiasm, humanity, every time it loses its way, will be able to lift itself up and set out again on the right path. In this sense it has been said with profound insight that 'beauty will save the world'."

During the winter, offshore storms raise waves that crash on the rocks, sending spray soaring above them. I most associate these images with the Sonoma Coast.



Cormorants No. 1, Sonoma Coast, 2015



After the Crash, Sonoma, 2015



Crashing Wave No. 6, Sonoma, 2015



Near Del Mar Point No. 3, Sea Ranch, 2015



Ocean Surf No. 2, Sonoma Coast, 2018



Ocean Surf No. 5, Sonoma Coast, 2018



Receding Wave No. 3, Sonoma, 2015

In other seasons, however, the ocean lives up to its pacific name.



Before Sunrise, Curlew Reach, 2019



First Light No. 1, Shell Beach, 2019

Route 1's journey through Sonoma County begins at Bodega Bay.



Fishing Boats, Bodega Bay, 2019



Carmet Beach No. 3, Sonoma County, 2019

After crossing the Russian River and traversing the town of Jenner, the highway proceeds through coastal ranch land to Russian Gulch Creek and climbs a series of switchbacks to the top of a bluff overlooking the Pacific. The highway winds across the faces of a series of cliffs that plunge into the ocean. To the motorist's relief the road leaves the cliffs behind and comes at last to more hospitable terrain.



Route 1, Sonoma, 2015

From here to Gualala and beyond one enjoys stunning views of rugged coastline, bluffs, meadows, and forests.



Crashing Surf No. 3, Sonoma Coast, 2015



Near Del Mar Point No. 3, Sea Ranch, 2017



Del Mar Point, Sea Ranch, 2017



Coastline No. 1, Near Gualala Point, 2018

Twelve miles north of Jenner one comes to Fort Ross, which marks the southernmost point of Russian colonization in the Pacific Northwest.



Fort Ross, Sonoma, 2015

After passing Stillwater Cove Regional Park and Salt Point State Park, one reaches Sea Ranch, a development of distinctive wooden homes landscaped to reflect the area's agricultural heritage and to blend with the coastal environment.



Four Chairs, Sea Ranch, 2015



Weathered Fence, Sea Ranch, 2017

In spring, wildflowers adorn the meadows and bluffs.



Near Del Mar Point No. 1, Sea Ranch, 2017



Near Del Mar Point No. 2, Sea Ranch, 2017



Near Carmet Beach No. 4, Sonoma County, 2019

To keep meadows from filling with shrubs and trees that might block ocean views, Sea Ranch deploys flocks of sheep to munch their way through unwanted vegetation.



Sheep No. 5, Sea Ranch, 2019

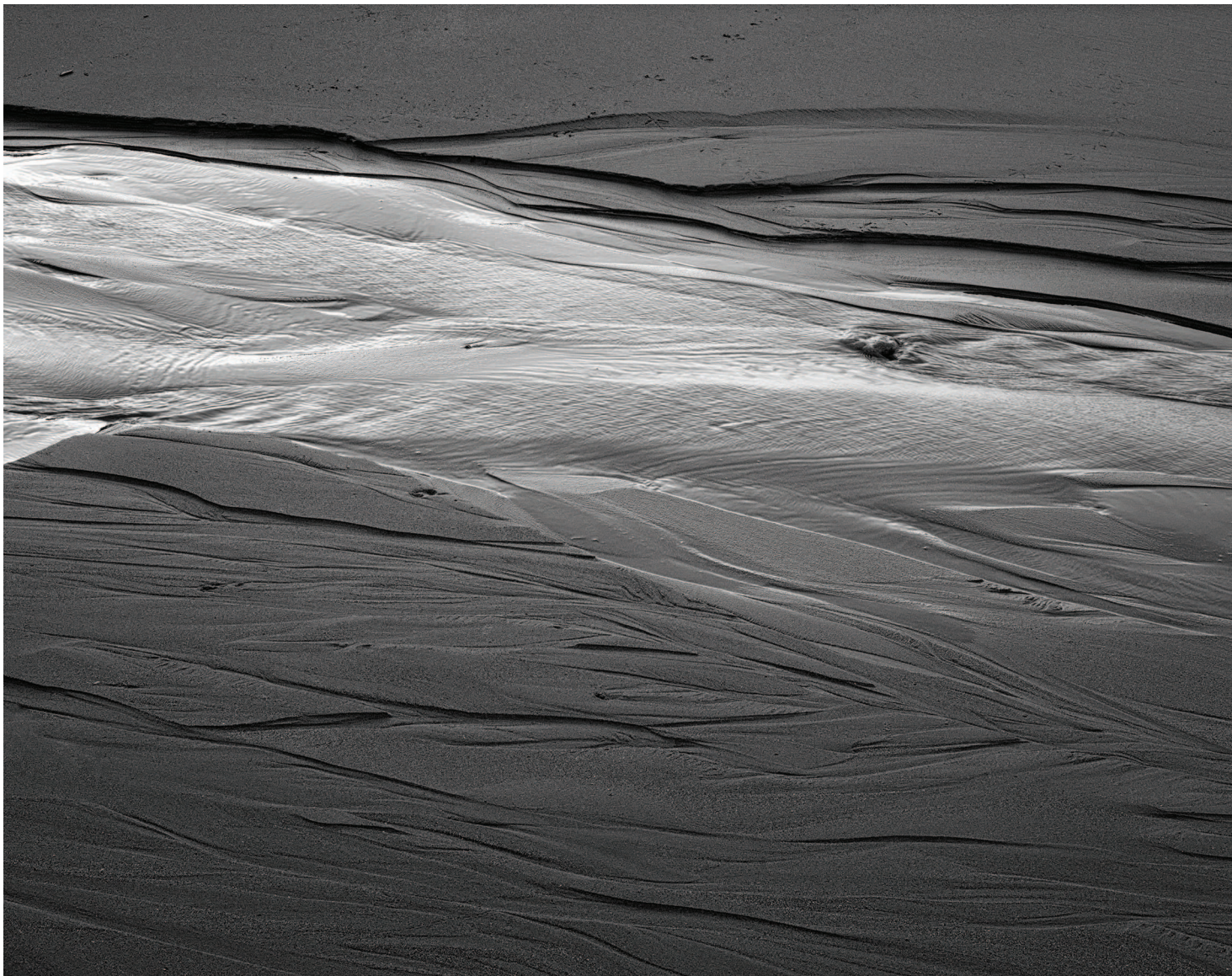
Streams draining water off bluffs and meadows and receding ocean waves draw intricate patterns in the sand.



Stream, Sonoma County, 2018



Water and Sand No. 1, Shell Beach, 2019



Water and Sand No. 2, Shell Beach, 2019



Deer Tracks in the Sand, Shell Beach, 2019



Water and Sand No. 3, Shell Beach, 2019



Shell Beach at Sunrise No. 4, 2019

Visit the beaches when a low tide coincides with sunrise. The preceding high tide will have erased footprints left the day before. The low tide exposes swathes of undisturbed sand. The sunrise, if not obscured by low clouds, offers delicate lighting.



Shell Beach at Sunrise No. 5, 2019



Driftwood, Shell Beach, 2019



First Light No. 2, Shell Beach, 2019

A morning shrouded in fog reveals blades of grass adorned with drops of water and looming boulders, fallen from ocean bluffs.



Raindrops on Grass, Sonoma, 2015



Shell Beach No. 1, Sonoma County, 2019



Near Rocky Point Beach No. 3, Sonoma County, 2019

The coastline along the south end of Sea Ranch and extending southward consists of black conglomerate rock embedded with gravel of all sizes. The black rock contrasts beautifully with the spray of crashing waves, but the rock itself is coarse and ugly. At the north end of Sea Ranch, however, sandstone predominates. Wind and water carve the sandstone into weird, beguiling shapes.



Eroded Sandstone No. 2, Sea Ranch, 2015



Near Del Mar Point No. 1, Sea Ranch, 2015



Eroded Sandstone No. 5, Sonoma, 2015

One comes at last to the Gualala River, the town of Gualala, and the northern boundary of the Sonoma Coast.

One day at Salt Point a stranger exclaimed, "This scenery is fantastic."
"It is," replied my wife. "This is the most beautiful place on Earth."



Gualala, Sonoma, 2015

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About This Portfolio

I took the photographs in this portfolio over many trips to Sea Ranch and the Sonoma Coast. I used a Nikon D800E camera, chosen for the high resolution of the sensor. I used 50mm *f*/1.8 and 85mm *f*/1.8 prime lenses and a 50mm *f*/2.8 perspective control tilt-shift lens. I processed the photographs in Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop using the Nik Collection of plug-ins. I composed the text in this book in Optima using Adobe InDesign.

You can find many of these photographs, along with dozens of photographs of other beautiful places, on the website at nigrumetalbum.com. If you would like to track my photographic activities, you may follow me on Twitter (twitter.com/sashleyphotos). You can reach me by email at stephen.ashley@strattonpress.com.

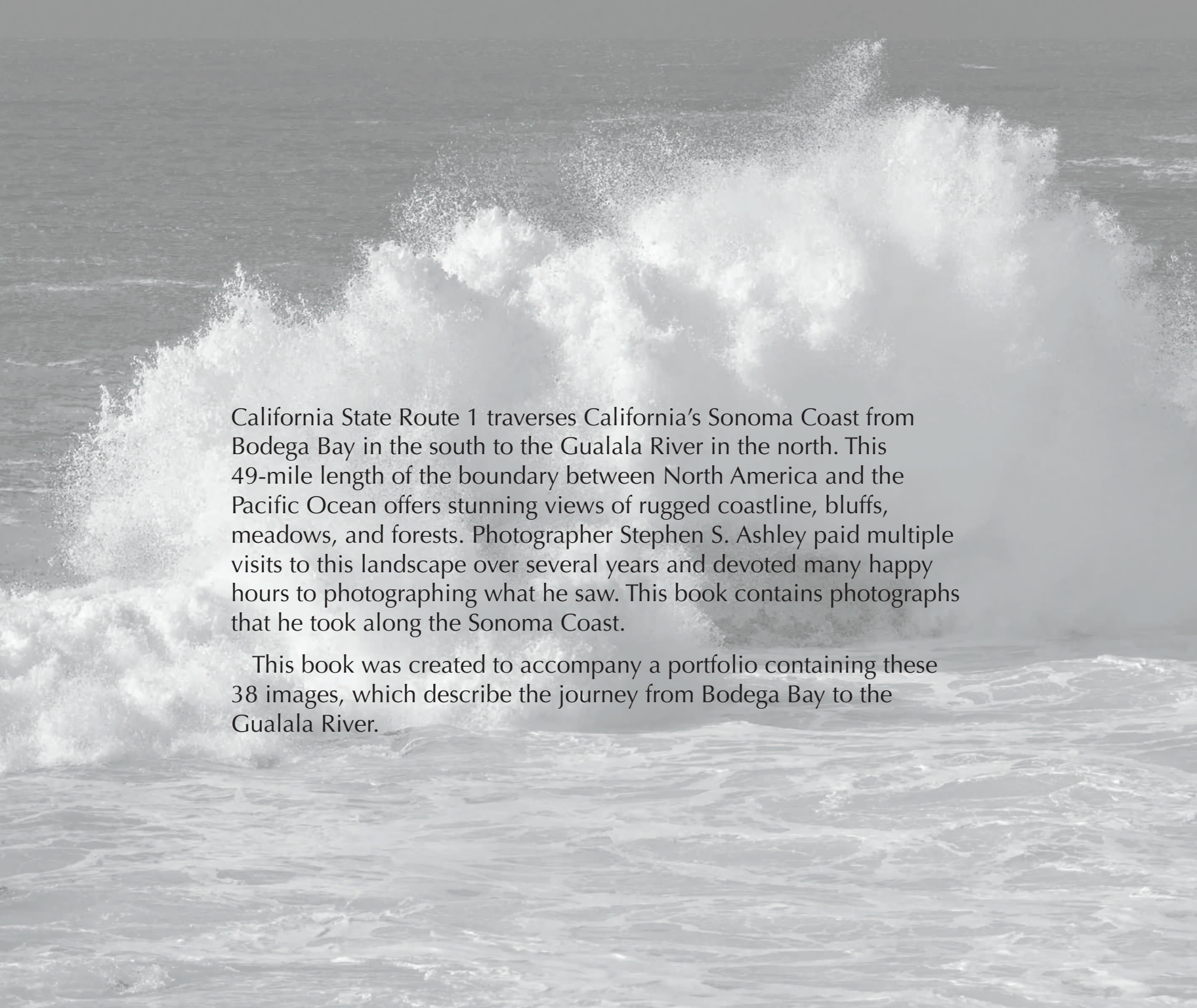
This portfolio and many other photographs are available for purchase on the website nigrumetalbum.com and on Etsy at nigrumetalbum.etsy.com. Printed versions of this book and of my other photography books are available at www.blurb.com/user/sashley; pdf versions are available for free at nigrumetalbum.com/books.

About the Photographer

When I was a teenager, my parents rented a house with a bomb shelter in the basement. I discovered that when I turned off the lights, the bomb shelter was perfectly black, and I realized that it would make an ideal darkroom. I assembled one, using a Kodak slide projector as an enlarger. The light from the projector burned so brightly that it solarized the enlarging paper. Thus began my photographic avocation.

During my career I engaged in many occupations—fire fighter, typesetter, lawyer, writer, publisher, law professor, software developer, flight instructor—but all the while I honed my photographic skills. After a serious illness forced me to give up my law-related work, my retirement gave me the opportunity to devote my time to expanding my portfolio and to sharing my photographs with a wider audience.

I had no formal education in photography but learned from many teachers. My primary mentor was my uncle, Roy Stratton, who freely shared with me his deep knowledge of photography. In the 1970s and 1980s the University of California Extension programs at Berkeley and Santa Cruz offered a wide selection of short courses on various aspects of photography, and I enrolled in several. These courses let me meet and learn from Stuart Scofield, Mark Citret, and others. I also had the good fortune to attend a Friends of Photography program, where I met Ruth Bernhard, Morley Baer, John Sexton, Marilyn Bridges, and William Christenberry. More recently, in 2014, 2015, and 2016, I traveled to Moab, Utah, to attend the Moab Photography Symposium, where I had an opportunity to photograph with Judith Zimmerman, Colleen Miniuk-Sperry, Bruce Hucko, and Guy Tal.



California State Route 1 traverses California's Sonoma Coast from Bodega Bay in the south to the Gualala River in the north. This 49-mile length of the boundary between North America and the Pacific Ocean offers stunning views of rugged coastline, bluffs, meadows, and forests. Photographer Stephen S. Ashley paid multiple visits to this landscape over several years and devoted many happy hours to photographing what he saw. This book contains photographs that he took along the Sonoma Coast.

This book was created to accompany a portfolio containing these 38 images, which describe the journey from Bodega Bay to the Gualala River.