

BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK
GENERAL PLAN

Resources Inventory

REGIONAL INFLUENCES
Part Two: Scenic Resources

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Scenic Resources

Introduction

The intent of this section of the inventory is to describe the scenic qualities of the land surrounding Big Basin and how it frames the park. The large numbers of people who pass near to or arrive at the park by public roads go through a variety of visual experiences. This mountainous landscape offers many inspiring panoramas. Notwithstanding its nearness to one of the world's great metropolitan centers, Big Basin remains relatively remote due to the combined effects of topography and the available routes of access that take advantage of the rugged nature of the neighboring landscape.

This section will focus mainly on the views from the major roads to and near the park, as these are the locations from which the most people experience this land. State Highway 9 is a state designated scenic highway, which winds up and over the Santa Cruz Mountains from Saratoga and then snakes its way down the western slopes to Santa Cruz. State Highway 236, which cuts off from Highway 9 at Waterman Gap roughly four miles downhill from the crest of the mountains, follows a twisting path into the park, runs through the Park Headquarters area, and continues on down the mountains through several communities before rejoining Highway 9. The segment of this road downhill from the park is less tightly curved, wider, and has more developments along it than that uphill of the park. The rarely traveled China Grade joins Highway 236 uphill from the park and defines a segment of the park's northern boundary. The other major route discussed in this report is State Highway 1, the Coast Highway. It is also a state designated scenic highway and passes through a tiny corner of the park at the outlet of Waddell Creek at Rancho del Oso.

Overview of Scenic Character

The park lies on the western face of the Santa Cruz Mountains. These slopes stretch roughly 15 miles from crest to coast in the area of the park. The landscape is characterized by many ridges running generally southwest from the summit toward the ocean. These ridges embrace the short watersheds of numerous creeks, many of their outlets less than a mile apart. Most of the length of coastline in the area of the park is characterized by broad marine terraces, some of which have long been in agricultural uses.

A variety of vegetation communities grace the ridges that are visible from the major roads near the park. Some are forested with deep green mixed evergreen forest (many in redwoods, Douglas fir, madrone, and tanoak); other drier slopes and ridgetops exhibit oak woodlands or chaparral. Some mountainsides and ridge crests are grassy or even reveal areas of bare soil. Along most of the coast, the closer the ocean, the more likely that the dominant vegetation type will be grass or coastal scrub.

The mountain ridges that make up the park are prominent in this landscape. They are an anomaly in the vicinity because they are forested closer to the ocean than most other ridges that are

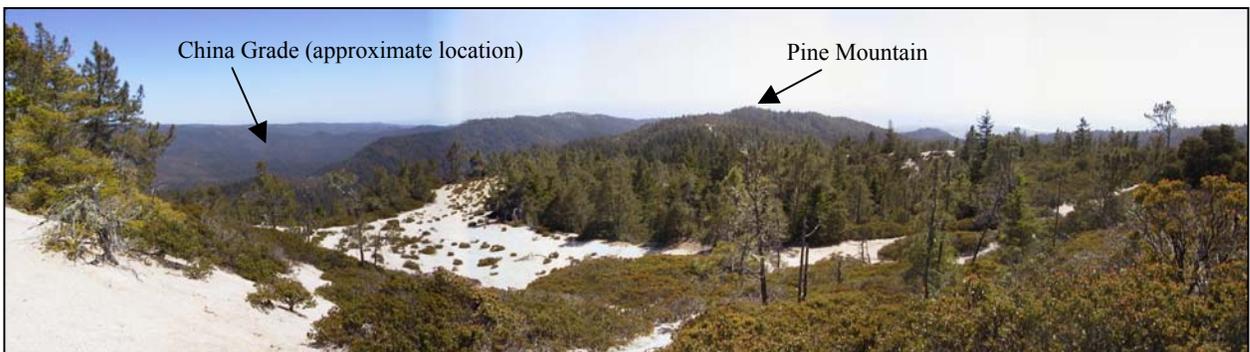
nearby. In fact, the tree-covered top of the ridge north of Waddell Creek extends to the edge of the sea, where it abruptly ends as a high, eroding bluff.

Major Views

The upper slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains are more forested than their lower reaches and the hills that separate them from the broad marine terrace near the ocean. Views from within the park show miles of forest receding into the distance, or the haze, depending upon the day's atmospheric conditions. The most revealing views of the different kinds of landscapes that flank the park, especially on its coastal side, are from Highway 1. This visual documentation will begin with an overview of vistas from within the park and then document the scenic resources and visitor experiences that are available from the major roads in the park's vicinity.

The View from the Park

The Chalks



Photograph 1. From the Chalks, looking east across Castle Rock State Park

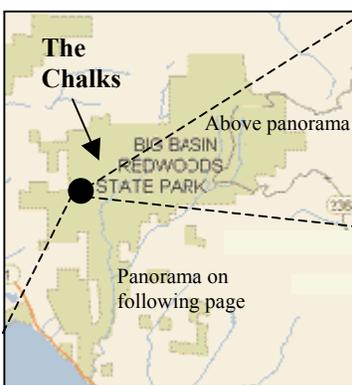
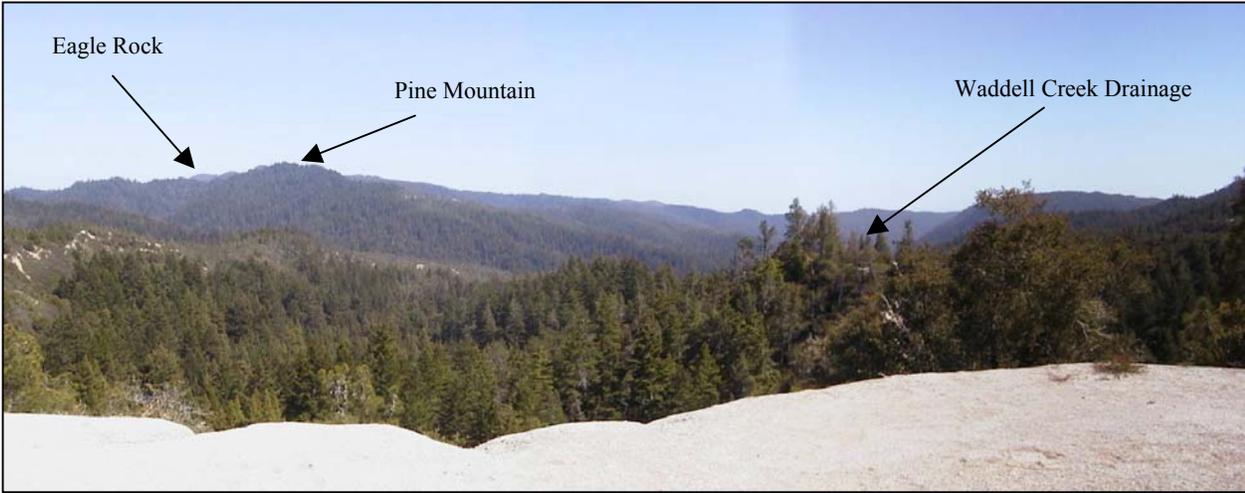


Figure 1. View from the Chalks

The Chalks is a high ridge on the western side of the park. It receives its name from the light Santa Cruz mudstone and Monterey sandstone of which it is composed. This shows through the relatively sparse vegetation in many places. Several of the surrounding ridges are composed of the same material. This high point offers one of the best vantage points across the park. Photograph 1, above, looks across the park toward another of the viewpoints from which a panorama was taken for this inventory, China Grade. It also shows the thick green forest that covers most of the land within the park.

Photograph 2 shows close up the startlingly white sandstone. As does the photograph above, it illustrates the steepness of the ridges that make up the park. The right third of the panorama contains the lower reaches of the Waddell Creek Canyon. The relative distance from this vantage point is apparent from the increasingly hazy conditions across that canyon.



Photograph 2. From the Chalks, looking toward the broad vista encompassing Eagle Rock, Pine Mountain, and the deep wooded canyon of Waddell Creek.

From the same position, views toward the west and on this day in the mid-afternoon, toward the sun, were almost completely obscured by haze. Photograph 3 shows the mostly grassy marine terrace west of Big Basin, which forms a visually strong contrast to the forested and mountainous parklands in the foreground. The angle of the view is generally toward Ano Nuevo Point and includes a part of Ano Nuevo State Reserve.



Photograph 3. The map to the right shows the large tract of private property between Highway 1 and a large part of the Ano Nuevo State Reserve. The reservoir on this land is visible on the left side of the photo in a large grove of trees.

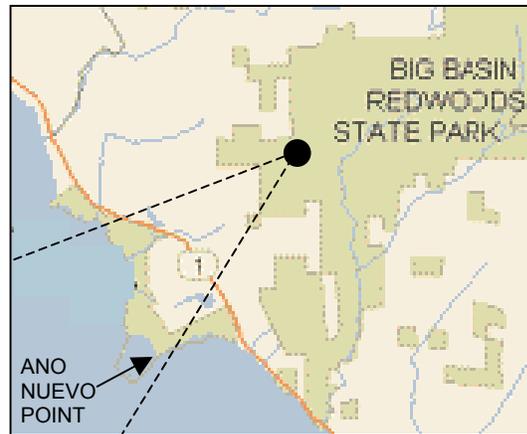


Figure 2. From the Chalks toward the Coast

Views from Major Roads

Each of the aforementioned roads in the area of the park offer motorists a visual experience of the highest quality. The small part of the park that is available for viewing by automobile is deep in the redwood forest and, therefore, offers no views of the surrounding landscape. It is only

from the park's high promontories that an overview of the park and its surroundings is available. Only the hardiest of the park's visitors either hike, bike, or ride horseback to experience these rewarding views.

China Grade

Because the ridges on the western face of the Santa Cruz Mountains are generally progressively lower as they slope down to the ocean, there are many opportunities to observe panoramas from highways 35, 9, and 236. However, there are not many chances to safely pull over and stop to admire these views. China Grade not only presents a broad view over the park, but it also offers safe parking space on the road shoulder. The view is similar to that from Highway 35 in the vicinity of the park but is more intimate because it is closer.

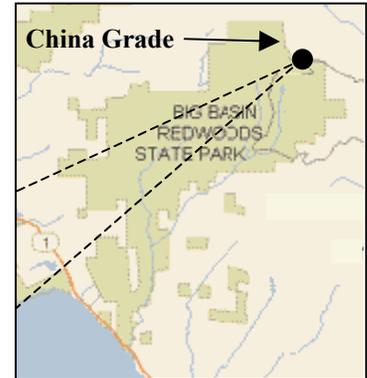


Figure 3. Looking west from China Grade



Photograph 4. The view toward the ocean from China Grade. On this particular day, conditions were hazy, so only the nearer ridges appear clearly. Truly clear days only occur after rain.

Highway 9 -- Sempervirens Point

Roughly a mile and a half down Highway 9 from its junction with Highway 35 is the vista point constructed by the Sempervirens Fund at Sempervirens Point. Highway 9 is a road well traveled by the people who live in the region. Tourists driving slowly to enjoy the scenery usually find themselves with an anxious line of locals wishing to pass. Sempervirens Point offers a safe viewpoint from which to admire the mosaic of vegetation that characterizes the area around Big Basin Redwoods State Park. It is located in the northwestern quadrant of Castle Rock State Park, and the view to the east is of a grassy meadow

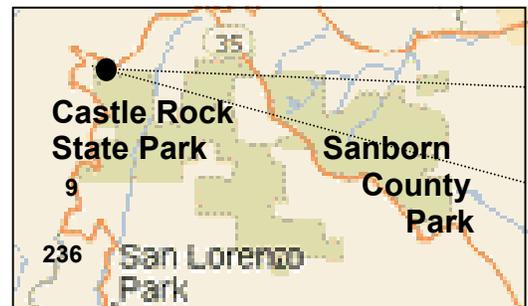
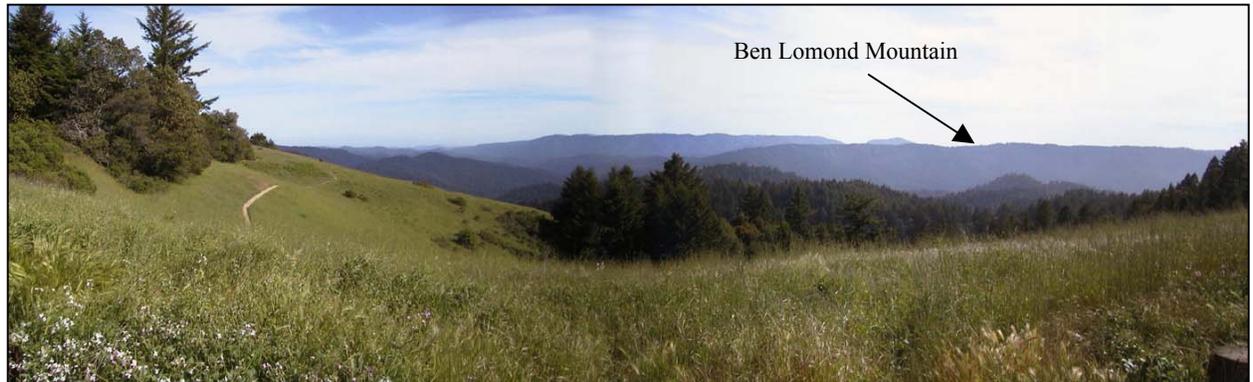


Figure 4. View from Sempervirens Point

with groves of conifers receding toward several long, forested ridges. In the spring, wildflowers abound in the meadow and along the roadsides.



Photograph 5. Sempervirens Point looking east across Castle Rock State Park and beyond

For the most part, Highway 9 is a rural connector between a scattering of small communities spread out along its length from the summit to the city of Santa Cruz.

Highway 236

This road is the true gateway into Big Basin. From the moment its northern leg leaves Highway 9 at Waterman Gap, it feels more primitive than the roads that have been left behind. It is narrow, and much of its length has no center line. The turns are tighter, signs of civilization fewer, vegetation closer to the side of the road, and road cuts are mossy banks. From both directions into the park on Highway 236, upon descending into the “basin,” redwoods come to dominate the view. The vegetation seems to grow taller, and the canopy closes overhead to hide the sky and diminish the light of the sun.



Photograph 6. Especially from the northeast entrance to the park along Highway 236, scenes like this build excitement about the increasing grandeur of the redwood forest and anticipation of arrival at the park’s core.

The Park Headquarters area appears suddenly after miles of twisting, narrow road. The park feels more remote than it actually is “as the crow flies.” Though there have been other entrances during Big Basin’s long history, the original planners selected the long and tortuous route of Highway 236 so as to create an entry experience that is slow and relatively difficult and allows visitors to leave the stress of city life behind. With millions of people living within fifty miles of this quiet refuge, the road has kept the park for those who are willing to expend the effort.



Photograph 7. Entering the core of the park

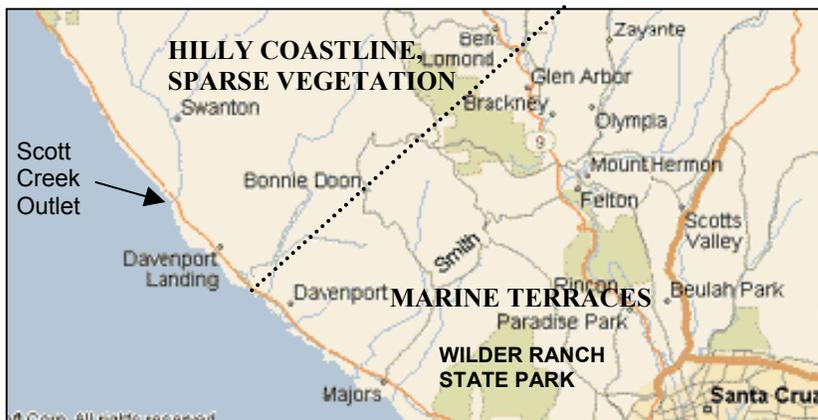


Photograph 8. The administration building, a hub of activity.

The southern stretch of Highway 236 is more a rural byway than the mountain track that enters the park from above. It has fewer curves and has two lanes divided by a double yellow line. Though it affords the same sense of anticipation and descent into a different world as the upper entrance, signs of civilization appear quickly upon leaving the park. Mailboxes and gateways are frequent, and the highway passes through the middle of the exclusive Boulder Creek Golf and Country Club. It rejoins Highway 9 at the town of Boulder Creek. This town is small and has maintained an aesthetic reminiscent of the past on its main streets, but it is a bustling community that contrasts greatly with the redwood dimmed and quiet reaches of Big Basin.

Highway 1

By far the broadest panoramic views of the landscape around Big Basin are from Highway 1. Owing to the openness of the marine terrace at the coast, it is possible to see for many miles. Driving north from Santa Cruz, the landscape goes through a series of transformations. Discrete landscape types appear suddenly and then give way to other forms of terrain.



From Wilder Ranch State Park west of Santa Cruz roughly to Scott Creek, the scenery is dominated by marine terraces. These are bisected by forested canyons that terminate in sandy pocket beaches where they meet the Pacific Ocean. Views are panoramic both

Figure 5. The coast between Wilder Ranch and Scott Creek, just north of Davenport

toward the ocean and inland. The main signs of human activity involve agriculture. Cultivated fields surround the highway. From time to time, rustic agricultural buildings come into view.



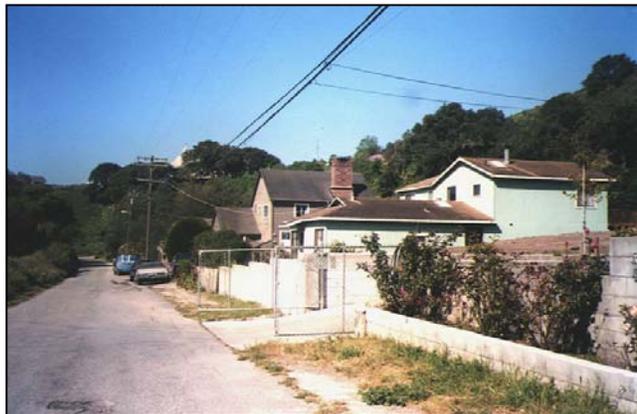
The Department and the Bureau of Land Management are planning a large tract of land in this area for future public use.

Photograph 9. Many of the agricultural complexes that are characteristic of the scenery along Highway 1 north of Santa Cruz are old and worn. However, most fit the setting so that their general impression is rustic, rural, and attractive, rather than intrusive and unnecessary in the scene.



Photograph 10. A typical scene of a cultivated field inland from Highway 1. This picture looks northwest toward the hilly land typical of the coast north of Davenport. The cement plant at Davenport is dimly visible through the haze to the left of the truck.

Davenport is a small town, where motorists can stop for food or gasoline. The low hills that surround the town hide its size, as they obscure the roads running inland and the homes and ranches that they access. Both the face that Davenport presents the highway (not pictured here because of unfavorable light conditions on the day these photographs were taken) and many of the town considerable scenic value and charm.



Photograph 11. One of Davenport's charming back streets.



Photograph 12. A scene typical of the rolling landscape north of Davenport. An advantage of this site is the turnout, which allows motorists to pull off the highway to allow faster cars to pass or to admire the scene at their leisure. Turnouts are sometimes not available along the most scenic stretches of the highway.

North of Scott Creek, the landscape becomes drier and the vegetation more sparse. This undulating terrain continues on, with the ridges rapidly becoming higher and more wooded just south of the mouth of Waddell Creek. This is where Big Basin Redwoods State Park touches Highway 1 and the ocean. The broad canyon, clothed in rare native Monterey Pine forest, that surrounds Waddell Creek signals arrival at the Rancho del Oso sector of the park. The photograph below is a view looking upstream from the access road to the nature center at Rancho del Oso.



Photograph 13. Looking up the canyon surrounding Waddell Creek from the Rio del Oso parking lot

Waddell Creek runs through the only beach at Big Basin. The beach is wide and sandy and attractive to individuals and groups for a wide assortment of activities. Often, large groups gather there for water sports that take advantage of this especially windy location. Surfing and wind surfing are popular. The photograph on the next page illustrates a relatively new sport, board sailing, consisting of a small surf board attached to a big kite, which can lift a surfer into the air for various kinds of twists and somersaults. Waddell Beach is a popular place for these kinds of competitions.



*Photograph 14.
Competitive board
sailing at Waddell Beach*

In addition to the beach, the high eroding bluff north of Waddell Creek is a scenic and geologic feature that also marks the park's encounter with the sea. This scene is a major contrast to the views that flank Highway 1 for many miles to the north and south. Along the several hundred yards of the cliff's face, the highway is constrained between the low bluff over the beach and a fence on the inland side to keep rocks and dirt from falling onto the roadway. Almost exactly where the bluff ends, the landscape again changes abruptly at the San Mateo County line.



Photograph 15. The bluff towering over Highway 1

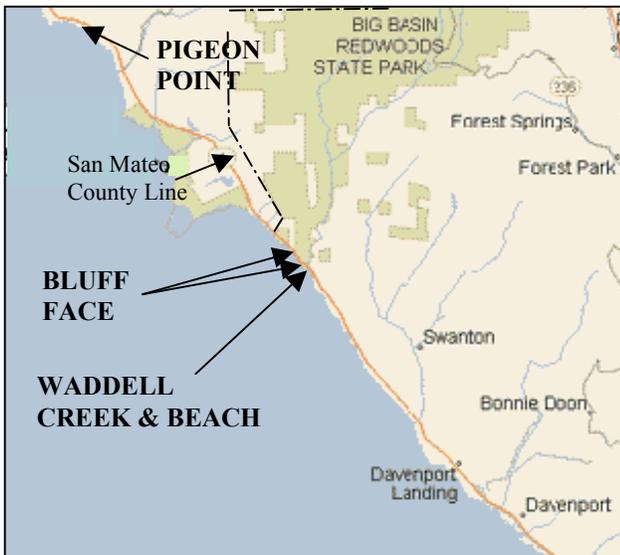


Figure 6. The coastline between Davenport and Pigeon Point

Continuing upcoast into San Mateo County, the landscape again becomes rolling and wooded, although the vegetation is more luxurious than it was south of Scott Creek. The overstory is another of the few native Monterey pine forests in the state, with scrub and grass beneath. Also, the marine terraces have returned, and it is far wider than it was between Davenport and Santa Cruz. The bluffs and the beach just north of the county line are the site of Ano Nuevo State Reserve where, for many months of the year, enormous elephant seals can be seen by guided tours. Inland of the highway is Ano Nuevo State Park – too new to show on this map -- which will be a visitor-serving park in the future.

The views from this portion of the highway are on a grand scale. The panorama in Photograph 16 is a vista looking back toward the park from a point between the San Mateo County line and Pigeon Point. The high land in the distance is a hazy blend of the ridges in Big Basin Redwoods State Park and those north of it, none of which extend all the way to the ocean.



Photograph 16. Looking south along Highway 1 toward the park

Photograph 17 looks northwest from a point roughly a mile north of the picture above. The Pigeon Point Lighthouse is visible on the left of the highway and gently rolling and occasionally wooded land on its right. This is the northern extent of this scenic resources study for Highway 1.



Photograph 17. The view from Highway 1 toward Pigeon Point

With few exceptions, the scenic resources along Highway 1 in this vicinity are considered to be top quality. There is a variety of terrain, land uses, and vegetation and a rich contrast between wide marine terraces and high ridges, the ocean on one side and the western edge of the continent on the other, and dry scrubby areas nearby lush forests. Human-made elements mostly blend into the surrounding landscape, giving an altogether rural character to the scenery. There is no hint of the burgeoning metropolis just over the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Ephemeral Conditions

Being situated beside the Pacific Ocean, the western side of the Santa Cruz Mountains is heavily influenced by marine weather patterns. In fact, the weather and the changes it brings are the most ephemeral aspects of the scenic resources in the area. Storms, which occur mostly in the winter, usually hit this area with more force than they have after they've passed to the east and spent themselves against these slopes. The rain brings new growth of annual grasses and other vegetation, spreading green across the landscape. As the ground dries with the cessation of the rains around May, the grass turns the famous California golden, though many from climes that experience wet summers might just call it brown. To experience this difference, compare the panorama from Sempervirens Point on page 43 with that of the coastal grassland on page 48.

Thus, in August, the same view that might inspire a Californian might disappoint someone from Pennsylvania.

The fog, which mostly appears in the warm months, steals in from the ocean and lingers here longer than it does in most inland locations. Occasionally, it lasts all day or for day after day. Many visitors to the area even from inland California are not aware that the overcast is fog and see it as a sign of impending rain. Though it will not produce rain, the fog carries significant water vapor, some of which is captured by the waiting branches of the local vegetation, especially the redwood trees, for which it is an absolutely crucial source of dry season moisture. These remarkable trees can grow in areas far from the ocean, and individual specimens can thrive even in the toasty summers of California's Central Valley. However, these isolated trees cannot form a forest. To reproduce, redwoods require the reliable humid bath that the fog provides. The fog also spares this land the brunt of the summer's heat. After the fog "burns off" during the summer, it is sometimes very warm at Big Basin. On days when the fog fails to appear, though, it can be hot.

Because the air carries moisture and dust, even on the sunniest of days, the atmosphere is often hazy. The best views from the ridgetops most often occur after heavy rains, and these are usually during the winter when the fewest visitors are around to experience this scenic value.



Photograph 18. High fog can sometimes last all day

Negative Visual Features

From the tops of the mountains flanking the park, down all the roads described in this section, and to the dramatic coastline near the park, it is difficult to find truly negative visual features. All that do exist are human-made and, though there may be many, only a very small number actually intrude upon views. Most are hidden by landforms or vegetation.



Photograph 19. The cement plant at Davenport

From Roads

The most jarring and obvious feature visible from a road that can detract from a positive scenic experience is the cement plant just north of Davenport. Its tall tower and smoke stack are visible for many miles from both the north and the south. Photograph 19 was taken from the north. Photograph 10 of the field with the

truck shows the plant from its less intrusive (south) side, where much of it is masked by vegetation. In addition, the land behind the plant is scoured and scarred. By way of contrast, in an attempt to provide a positive face to the passing traffic on Highway 1, the plant's entrance has been attractively landscaped with trees and flowers.

Barely visible from Highway 1 is a large lumber mill. Stacks of wood peek over the edge of a bluff inland from the highway. They could be missed entirely, because the inclination of most people is to look toward the ocean when traveling the less dramatic stretches of the highway.

Not all of the towns along Highway 9 are as charming as Boulder Creek. For example, Brookdale on Highway 9 lacks Boulder Creek's appeal. Still, even at the 35 mile-per-hour speed limit, a driver is through these towns quickly and back to a road where only front gates and mailboxes amid the lush vegetation on either side of the road are the norm.

Some onlookers may consider the older or unused agricultural buildings, especially along Highway 1 to be unattractive. However, not all of these kinds of developments are as rustic as those pictured in Photograph 9.

Other elements that might bother some are the telephone poles and wires that accompany the most traveled roads in the area. Several of the pictures in this section include them. These are objects so familiar to most people that they can almost ignore them. However, in some cases along Highway 1, as grand as a view might be, the poles and wires manage to find their way into a photograph simply because they are so common as to be unseen.

Other minor infringement upon the area's scenic resources include the occasional off-road vehicle trail or debris pile, but these are occasional and isolated intrusions.

From the Park

Though visible to only the strong souls who can get to Buzzard's Roost in the eastern part of the park, there is a negative view that warrants mention. The abandoned ruin of the radio repeater shown in the picture to the right is on private property. Were it within the park, it would be removed. Because it is not in the park, it may remain as a major intrusion in the one of the best views at Big Basin. Because only a small number of the people who visit the park actually see the repeater, it could be considered a less negative scenic element than those that are viewed by many visitors. On the other hand, the visitors who expend the effort to get to Buzzard's Roost could be considered deserving of a more positive visual experience as a reward for their persistence.



Photograph 20. Ruins of a radio repeater from Buzzard's Roost

Summary

The scenic resources in the area around Big Basin Redwoods State Park are overwhelmingly positive. It is no wonder that this area draws millions of tourists annually. Big Basin sits like a distant Bali Hai within this splendid setting, which buffers and frames it. Unsightly detractions are the exception, not the rule.

When considering views that might detract from the generally outstanding quality of these scenic resources, it should be noted that it is difficult to be objective about aesthetics. For example, the cement plant does have a dramatic quality and is a touch of industry in this rural setting. There are some who might enjoy the complex pattern of openings in its high tower or be awed by its white bulk peeking over the vegetation as they drive north along Highway 1. This could also be true of the other so-called negative features described here. As is beauty, ugly is in the eye of the beholder.

The chart on the next page categorizes the attributes of the views that were a part of this study and divides them into positive or negative scenic resources.

BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK
Scenic Resources of the Area Around the Park

Positive Visual Resources and Scenic Characteristics	
Panoramic Views	China Grade toward the ocean over the park Sempervirens Point generally east over Castle Rock SP The Chalks offer a 360-degree view over the park, out to the ocean and northward Most of the way along Highway 1, impressive 360-degree views are available
Dramatic geologic, topographic, or landscape features, or major stands of trees	Coast redwood trees; redwood forest High forested ridges Broad marine terraces Eroding end of ridge north of Waddell Creek Native Monterey pine forests
Distinctive Manmade Elements	Twisty roads, especially the Highway 236 entry experience Houses and cabins, gates, driveways, and mailboxes Mansions and private clubs Cement plant Coastal agriculture, including rustic buildings and equipment
Special Landscapes (visually distinctive areas)	“Chalks” – very light soil exposed on ridges Extremely high, steep mountains close to the ocean
Ephemeral Conditions	Fog Haze Weather: seasonal storms Vegetation: seasonal changes in plants’ appearance; green to golden grass fields
Negative Visual Features and Characteristics	
Dumping and Debris	Some debris along Highway 1; none in park
Landscape Scars	Behind cement plant OHV trails Agricultural buildings that are too rustic
Development and Utilities	Overhead lines, telephone poles Ruins of radio repeater interfering with the view from Buzzard’s Roost

