



Travel Story

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Famous Writers and Their California State Park Connections

Writers, artists and musicians have also found inspiration in the natural beauty and diversity of parks and beaches that make up the California State Park System. In particular, a number of famous authors have special connections with California State Parks:

Famous American humorist **Mark Twain** visited a number of California State Parks areas and wrote about them. For his visit to what is now Emerald Bay State Park at Lake Tahoe he wrote, "The air up there is very pure and fine, bracing and delicious. It is the same air the angels breathe." And his trip to what is now Mono Lake Tufa State Reserve he wrote in *Roughing It*, "So uncertain is the climate in summer that a lady who goes out visiting cannot hope to be prepared for all emergencies unless she takes her fan under one arm and her snowshoes under the other

Emerald Bay State Park, 22 miles south of Tahoe City, is one of Lake Tahoe's most popular natural attractions featuring the Emerald Bay Trail. The park phone number is (530) 541-3030.

Mono Lake Tufa Reserve, 10 miles south east of Lee Vining via Highways 395 and 120, preserves the "tufa towers" and is home to a large bird population. The park phone number is (760) 647-6331.

Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*, lived in one of the buildings that make up **Monterey State Historic Park**. Stevenson lived in the French Hotel (later changed to the Stevenson House in honor of the author) in 1879. He was courting his future wife at the time while she was visiting the area. Stevenson wrote his essay "The Old Pacific Capitol" while he was in Monterey. As many writers do, he made notes and impressions during his visit. There is some evidence to suggest that Stevenson's impressions of Point Lobos may well have inspired descriptions in *Treasure Island*. Monterey State Historic Park, in downtown Monterey, is open daily, however, hours vary. For more information, call the park at (831) 649-7118.]

The park website is http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=963

Robert Louis Stevenson State Park is located seven miles north of Calistoga. The park contains the old townsite of Silverado, one of the open pit mines, and the tent site where Stevenson wrote *Squatters* in Silverado. The park also has hiking trails, exhibits, a picnic area and an historic landmark monument to Stevenson.

[Robert Louis Stevenson State Park is open daily, however, hours vary. For more information, call the park at (707) 942-4575.]

Like Robert Louis Stevenson, **John Steinbeck**, author of *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, is also connected with **Monterey State Historic Park**. He lived near the park in the Lara-Soto Adobe in the 1940s. In Cannery Row, one of Steinbeck's characters actually "liked the Monterey jail (also near the park). It was a place to meet people. If he stayed there long enough all his friends were in and out. The time passed quickly. He was a little sad when he had to go, but his sadness was tempered with the knowledge that it was very easy to get back again."

The author of *Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, *The Sea Wolf*, and *The Cruise of the Snark*, **Jack London**, purchased a run-down, 130-acre farm in the Sonoma Valley, adding amenities that would make life comfortable without spoiling the natural landscape - the hills, canyons, fields, streams, and forest of oaks, madrones, California buckeyes, Douglas firs, and redwoods that, today, make up **Jack London State Historic Park**. He bought more land and, in 1911, he and his wife Charmian moved from the town of Glen Ellen to a small house in the middle of the ranch. This cottage was enlarged to 3,000 square feet of living space. He added a room on the west side of the house as a study, where he wrote many of his later works. The east wing of the house, built of stone, was part of an old winery.

Jack London's crowning achievement, aside from his writing, was to have been Wolf House, a planned-to-be magnificent stone and redwood structure that burned on August 22, 1913. Only the foundation and the stone walls, fireplaces and chimneys remained.

Today, visitors to Jack London State Historic Park can see the remains of Wolf House as well as the "Cottage", and other ranch structures. The Museum and Visitors Center is located in "The House of Happy Walls," the home Charmian London built. A trail leads through vineyards and a picnic area to the lake London constructed.

[Jack London State Historic Park is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Please call the park to confirm days and hours at (707) 938-5216.]

William Henry Dana writes in his famous *Two Years Before the Mast* that his ship the *California* anchored at Santa Barbara for a few days starting on January 14th, 1835, after a voyage of 150 days from Boston. He could see the Santa Barbara Presidio from his ship and the ship captain and/or mate had contact with the Mexican authorities stationed at the fort to obtain permission to engage in trade along the California coast. From that January beginning until May 8, 1936, Dana says he was engaged in trading and loading, drying and storing hides all along the California coast, visiting the ports at Santa Barbara, Monterey, San Pedro, San Diego, San Juan, and San Francisco numerous times. **El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park** preserves the seat of the Mexican government at the first port Dana stopped at upon arrival in California. Located in downtown Santa Barbara, the park phone number is (805) 965-0093.

In what is now the town of Pacific Palisades, **Will Rogers** built his ranch. The 31-room ranch house, which includes 11 baths and seven fireplaces, is surrounded by a stable, corrals, riding ring, roping arena, golf course, polo field - and riding and hiking trails that give visitors spectacular views of the ranch and the surrounding countryside - 186 acres. The ranch became **Will Rogers State Historic Park** in 1944 after the death of Rogers' wife.

Famous for his wit and expressions (such as "I never met a man I didn't like") Will Rogers was also famous for his horse and rope tricks. His career in vaudeville took him to Broadway and the Ziegfeld Follies and then on to Hollywood for movies, his own newspaper column, and radio show.

[Will Rogers State Historic Park is 15 miles west of the Los Angeles Civic Center. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Please call the park to confirm days and hours at (818) 880-0350.]

Sections of **Helen Hunt Jackson's** novel *Ramona* were inspired by her visit to Old Town San Diego, which is now **Old Town San Diego State Historic Park**. In fact, the wedding scene in the novel is set in the Old Adobe Chapel, adjacent to the park.

[San Diego State Historic Park is open daily. Please contact the park to confirm days and hours at (619) 220-5400.]

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