

Nature – and history - preserved

California State Parks in the Central Valley

California State Parks in the Central Valley not only preserve the state's vast natural legacy – but its historical legacy as well. Oak woodlands, a Gold Rush-era town, giant sequoias, the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans, a herd of tule elk, and a Native American ceremonial house, are just a few of the features found in state parks in the area.

Milder winter weather and fewer visitors make this time of year a great time to visit.

Here's a sample of what Central Valley State Parks have to offer:

Calaveras Big Trees State Park, northeast of Stockton and four miles northeast of Arnold on Highway 4, preserves the North Grove of giant sequoias. Over the years, other parcels of mixed conifer forests have been added to the park to bring the total area to approximately 6,500 acres. Calaveras became a State Park in 1931 and has been a major tourist attraction ever since.

In addition to the popular North Grove, the park has the primitive South Grove, featuring a five mile hiking trip through a spectacular grove of giant sequoias. Other attractions in the park include the Stanislaus River, Beaver Creek, the Lava Bluff Trail and Bradley Trail.

The park houses two main campgrounds with a total of 129 campsites, six picnic areas and hundreds of miles of established trails. The number for camping reservations is 1-800-444-PARK. On-line reservations are also available at www.parks.ca.gov.

Calaveras Big Trees is open year-round, sunrise to sunset. Activities include cross-country skiing, evening ranger talks, numerous interpretive programs, environmental educational programs, junior ranger programs, hiking, mountain biking, bird watching and summer school activities for school children.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



The park phone number is (209) 795-2334.

Caswell Memorial State Park is located along the Stanislaus River near the town of Ripon. The park's 258 acres protect the threatened and still declining riparian oak woodland, which once flourished throughout California's Central Valley.

The Yokut Native Americans lived along the river and collected acorns among the ancient groves. In the early 1800s, Spanish explorers and fur trappers were in the area.

A landowner named Thomas Caswell loved the forest and felt it should be preserved. In 1950, his children and grand-children donated 134 acres to the people of California. The park was open to the public in 1958. Additional donations and state purchases brought Caswell to its current size.

Caswell Memorial is home to several endangered animal species, including the riparian brush rabbit which is not known to exist anywhere else outside the park. Birds in the park include wintering sparrows, wrens, thrushes, wren-tit, thrasher and migrating songbirds.

The park phone number is (209) 599-3810.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, north of Bakersfield and 20 miles north of Wasco on Highway 43, is the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans.

The small farming community was founded in 1908 by Colonel Allen Allensworth and a group of others dedicated to improving the economic and social status of African Americans. Uncontrollable circumstances, including a drop in the area's water table, resulted in the town's demise.

With continuing restoration and special events, the town is coming back to life as a state historic park. The park's visitor center features a film about the site. A yearly rededication ceremony reaffirms the vision of the pioneers. The town is being restored now as a state historic park. Tours are available by making arrangements with the park in advance. The visitor center also features a video "The Spirit of Allensworth."

The most important building is the schoolhouse that was in use until 1972, and is furnished for period 1915.

Fifteen campsites are open year round accommodating RVs or tents, with table, camp stove and nearby flush toilets. Facilities for the disabled are available. A nearby picnic area is shaded by 75 large trees planted by the California Conservation Corps.

The park phone number is (661) 849-3433.

Columbia State Historic Park, three miles north of Sonora, off Highway 49, preserves the town's old Gold Rush-era business district, with shops, restaurants and two hotels.

Visitors have the chance to go back in time to the 1850s, imagining life when gold miners rubbed shoulders with businessmen and the other residents in Columbia. Visitors can watch proprietors in period clothing conduct business in

the style of yesterday, ride a 100 year-old stagecoach, hire a "fine steed" for a horseback ride through the "diggings," pan for gold, or tour an active gold mine.

The park phone number is (209) 532-0150.

George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area, 28 miles west of Merced, is surrounded by the Merced River. Set in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, the park is popular for swimming, fishing, and picnicking.

Once the home of Native Americans, the park has many trees and is home to various wildlife, especially birds.

The park has 21 family campsites and one large group site for tents or RVs up to 32 feet long. Picnic tables, fire grills, and piped water are provided. Flush toilets are available. Supplies can be obtained in Newman, five miles away. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 632-1852.

Great Valley Grasslands State Park, five miles east of Gustine on Highway 140, has 2,826 acres preserving one of few intact examples of native grasslands on the floor of the Central Valley.

The park is part of the larger Grasslands Ecological Area (GEA), a 180,000-acre complex of federal, state and private lands all managed for wildlife values. The GEA represents the largest remaining contiguous block of wetlands in California.

Several rare and endangered plant and animal species inhabit the park, including alkali sacaton, a native bunch grass, and the Delta button celery (*Erynum racemosum*) a state listed endangered species found in the flood plain of the San Joaquin River. Biologists have also reported the California Tiger Salamander and endangered vernal pool fairy shrimp and tadpole shrimp. Springtime wildflower displays, fishing and wildlife watching attract visitors to this

undeveloped park, which also encompasses the former Fremont Ford State Recreation Area.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



The park phone number is (209) 874-2056.

Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, eight miles east of Jackson and northeast of Stockton in the lower foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, is the site of the Northern Miwok Indian "grinding rock" where acorns were ground into a fine meal of flour, a staple in the Native American's diet. The limestone rock in the park is covered with 363 petroglyphs, or rock carvings.

A Native American village has been reconstructed and is used for various celebrations and ceremonies by a number of Native American communities. Also at the site is a round house, a bark conical dwelling and an Indian football field. The park's Chawse Regional Indian Museum has interpretive displays as well as demonstrations of traditional Miwok crafts.

Trails in the park offer visitors a chance to explore the meadows and surrounding forest as well as see the wildlife in the area. The park is a Watchable Wildlife Area.



There are 23 sites for tents or RVs, some up to 27 feet long. Picnic tables, fire grills, and piped water are provided. Flush toilets and coin-operated hot showers are available. The museum and a number of other facilities are wheelchair accessible. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 296-7488.

McConnell State Recreation Area, five miles southeast of Delhi on Highway 99 and south of Turlock, is on the banks of the Merced River. Fishing is popular for catfish, black bass and perch. There are over 70 acres of picnic, camping and play areas.

Trees in the park attract migrant songbirds during migration and, in the winter, sparrows, thrushes and woodpeckers.

There are 21 sites for tents or RVs up to 24 feet long and two group sites for tents only. Piped water, fire grills, and picnic tables are provided. Flush toilets and hot showers are available. Supplies can be obtained in Delhi, three miles away. Leashed pets are permitted.

The park phone number is (209) 394-7755.

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area, 20 miles northeast of Fresno via Highway 41 and Highway 145, has over 40 miles of shore land for water sports, offering visitors swimming, fishing, and boating. The park contains the original Millerton County Courthouse, built in 1867.

Hills surrounding the lake provide opportunities for hiking and observing wildlife, such as ground squirrels, cottontails, mule deer, badgers and bald and golden eagles. (During winter, the park has special boat tours to view the bald eagles.)

The lake was created by construction of the Friant Dam across the San Joaquin River in 1944.

The park's camping facilities include boat camping.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.



The park phone number is (559) 822-2332.

Tule Elk State Reserve, north of Gorman, south of Buttonwillow, west of I-5 via Stockdale Highway, protects a herd of tule elk, once in danger of extinction. Elk from the reserve have been successfully transplanted to other areas in California where free-roaming herds of tule elk can be found today.

In the 1880s, vast herds of tule elk were greatly reduced in number by hunting and loss of habitat. Cattleman Henry Miller began a 50-year effort to save them in 1874. At that time, few elk remained. In 1932, the herd was given

permanent protection in a 950-acre property, now known as Tule Elk State Reserve.

The elk are most active from late summer through early autumn. Visitors are encouraged to bring binoculars for better viewing.

The park has picnic areas and interpretive exhibits.

The park is a Watchable Wildlife site.

The park phone number is (661) 764-6881.

Turlock Lake State Recreation Area, 25 miles east of Modesto on the south side of the Tuolumne River, is in the rolling foothills of eastern Stanislaus County.

Open all year, the park offers camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming, boating, and water skiing. Visitors can also see the variety of native plant life in the park.

The park has 66 sites for tents or RVs up to 27 feet long. Piped water, fire grills, and picnic tables are provided. Flush toilets, showers, and a boat ramp are available. The boat dock is accessible, depending on water levels, for those who can self-transfer to boats. Leashed pets are permitted.

For more information, call (209) 874-2008 or (209) 874-2056 .

Wassama Round House State Historic Park, five miles northwest of Oakhurst and 55 miles north of Fresno, is used by local Native Americans as a ceremonial meeting place.

The park features special events and tours. Gathering Day, held the second Saturday in July, includes demonstrations of dancing, crafts and basket weaving.

The park phone number is (559) 822-2332.

For camping information, call Reserve American at (800) 444-7275 or go online to:

Visit California State Parks online at www.parks.ca.gov

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