

Fewer visitors – cooler weather

Fall Day Hikes - Fun in California State Parks

Now is a great time to discover the beauty and variety of California State Parks – with fewer visitors.

Discover trails and pathways through beaches, hills, and alongside rivers. Enjoy the outdoors with friends and family and get away from cities and cement.

To ensure your hike is enjoyable, it's important to wear proper shoes fit for hiking, wear a hat for sun protection, and bring drinking water. An early morning start offers hikers both cooler temperatures and a better chance to see wildlife. For a safe and pleasant outing, be sure to check the weather forecast.

Here are some ideas for fun fall day hikes in California State Parks:

HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Richardson Grove State Park (seven miles south of Garberville on Highway 101) offers spectacular hikes in old growth redwood and fir forests. The park's best example is the Durphy Creek Trail loop. The hike is about four miles long and takes hikers along Durphy Creek into beautiful redwood and fir forests, ending with views of the Eel River Canyon. For more information call the park at (707) 247-3318.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Malibu Creek State Park (four miles south of Highway 101 on Las Virgenes/Malibu Canyon Road) offers a getaway from the city for people to explore rugged terrain, spectacular gorges, and serene rolling hills of oak woodlands. Visitors can enjoy a short and easy loop trail at the Ann Skagar All-Access Trail, or take a stroll down the Back Country Trails on the High Road to the visitor center (one mile round trip) open most weekends. For a longer hike, continue past Century Lake and see where the popular TV series *M*A*S*H* was filmed (1.3 miles from the Visitor Center.) Over 30 miles of trails allow a glimpse into the park's history. Malibu Creek State Park once housed Crag's Country Club in the 1920's and later served as a backdrop for many films including *How Green Was My Valley* and *Planet of the Apes*. For more information, call the park (818) 880-0367.

Point Mugu State Park (15 miles south of Oxnard on Highway One) has over 75 miles of trails to explore a wild part of the Santa Monica Mountains. For a short hike filled with ocean vistas, the Scenic Trail leads hikers through coastal sage scrub on a moderate uphill grade. Follow the trail to where it ends at the scenic vista where you can view the Great Sand Dune from above. The trail loops down the fire road for a total hike of 1.5 miles from the trailhead at the back of the Sycamore Canyon Campground. For more information call the park at (805) 488-5223.

MARIN COUNTY

China Camp State Park (four miles east of San Rafael) has many trails, but it is one of the only parks with multi-use single-track trails. The presence of bicycles and horses may be disconcerting to new hikers looking for more solitude. There is, however, a short 3/4 mile flat loop walk called the Turtle Back Nature Trail that is open only to foot traffic. The trail skirts the edge of an old island on the shore of San Pablo Bay. Today, pickleweed marsh has replaced open waters and the trail gives a close-up view of the salt marshes that harbor such endangered species as the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse and the Clapper Rail, while the upland side of the trail reveals oaks, bays and grassland communities. For more information, call the park at (415) 456-0766.

Mount Tamalpais State Park (north of San Francisco's Golden Gate) has several opportunities for easy loop trails. The most spectacular loop is the Verna Dunshee Trail on the East Peak of the mountain. It's a 3/4 mile loop that circles the 2,571 foot summit and offers unparalleled views of the San Francisco Bay region. It is well worth the drive to the top of the mountain. There are other loop trails in the two to four mile range starting from the Pantoll or Rock Spring trailheads. For more information, visit the park website at www.mttam.net or call the park at (415) 388-2070.

Olompali State History Park (2.5 miles north of Novato) has a nice easy hike - the Miwok Loop Trail, which is about five miles long and has only about a 5% grade, making the walk very comfortable. If hikers are energetic, they can go to the top of the mountain (another 2.5 miles), again with a 5% grade.

Samuel P. Taylor State Park (15 miles west of San Rafael on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard) has the Cross Marin Trail, which runs through the park. The trail is about five miles long, half of which is paved, and all of which runs on an old railroad grade. The trail itself is major route through Marin County. There are also two single track trails that parallel about half the Cross Marin Trail which allows for a loop experience. The park has a self guided history brochure along part of the Cross Marin Trail, and information from the brochure is being put on panels along the trail with an estimated completion in April 2006. Another easy hike is the Pioneer Tree Trail, about two miles long with some elevation gain but not very steep. There is a self guided trail brochure available at the park kiosk, and information from the brochure is being put on panels on the trail with an estimated completion in April 2006.

MERCED COUNTY

Pacheco State Park (20 miles east of Gilroy) has miles of wilderness trails and is a great destination for hikers. On a clear day, the trail up to Spike's Peak (2.5 miles, one-way) offers excellent views of the Central Valley and surrounding Diablo Range. Visitors are encouraged to pick up a (free) trail map by the display at the park parking lot so they can choose their routes in this

beautiful (and very hilly) state park. Pacheco State Park is located between Los Baños and Gilroy on Highway 152 at Pacheco Pass. Take the Dinosaur Point Road exit south from the highway and turn right almost immediately at the park sign. (Please note there is no potable water at Pacheco State Park.) For information call (209) 826-6283.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY

Brannan Island State Park (three miles south of Rio Vista) has a new multi-use trail. The trail is a three mile loop, paved and accessible, offering hikers, bikers, strollers and rollers the opportunity to get out and enjoy the views the park has to offer. The trail has many starting points at or near all the major use areas of the park including the campground, boat launch, marina, day use area, visitor center and park entrance. Part of the trail takes visitors near undeveloped area of the park where an assortment of birds, coyote, and even a burrowing owl live, as well as waterfowl, Great Egrets, blue and green herons and beavers. Hikers can watch anglers catching a variety of fish in seven and three mile sloughs. Near the day use area of the park there is an interpretive trail with information about the endangered Antioch Dunes Evening Primrose. It is near one of the highest spots in the delta around 30 feet above sea level. The trail is completely ADA accessible and includes strategically located park benches. The trail utilizes some of the internal campground roads so it is often used by camping visitors and is clearly marked with direction arrows and symbol markers. For more information, call (916) 777-6671.

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Caswell Memorial State Park (six miles west of Ripon on Austin Road) offers visitors a leisurely ramble along the Stanislaus River. Various trail loops allow walks from .5 to 2.5 miles over relatively level terrain. The stately Valley Oaks that tower over the trails once sheltered the native Yokut people, and welcomed the first European explorers with a familiar sight similar to the mighty white oaks of their homelands. A vehicle entrance fee is required. Call (209) 599-3810 for more information.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Henry W. Coe State Park (14 miles east of Morgan Hill on East Dunne Avenue) has earned its reputation for steep terrain, but the park also features some less physically demanding trails. A good example is the Forest Trail – Springs Trail loop which makes a leisurely walk of about two to three hours along oak-studded ridges and through mixed woodlands. A self-guided trail brochure available at the park headquarters' visitor center introduces the shrubs and trees to be found along the way. Visitors should take East Dunne Avenue from Highway 101 in Morgan Hill. The road goes directly into the park after a winding climb of about 30 minutes. Call (408) 779-2728 for more information. During the winter the visitor center is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday. From Henry Coe's Hunting Hollow entrance east of Gilroy, the Hunting Hollow Trail follows a little creek bed with a stand of old Sycamores. Take Leavesley Road east from

Highway 101 in Gilroy, turning left (north) on New Avenue, and east again on Roop Road. Roop turns into the old Gilroy Hot Springs Road. Continue on Gilroy Hot Springs Road. The Hunting Hollow entrance will be on the right, 3.3 miles beyond the sign for the Coyote Lake turnoff. Call (408) 779-2728 for more information.

Visit California State Parks on line at www.parks.ca.gov

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