

Hidden Treasures in Northern California State Parks

California State Parks are known for campsites, trails and picnic areas – but they also contain surprises. Visitors can discover hidden treasures – if they know where to look.

MARIN and SAN FRANCISCO COUNTIES

Angel Island State Park has “the brig” inside the Guard House at East Garrison, surrounded by the remnants of military sites, some dating from the Civil War. Visitors who’ve seen Alcatraz, the “other island prison” in San Francisco Bay, can also visit “the brig,” which dates back a half-century earlier. When the East Garrison visitor center is open, visitors can walk above on a catwalk or actually go inside the jail cells, including the isolation area where the usual bars are replaced by solid steel doors and a lattice of steel straps, making them particularly dark and gloomy. These jail cells once housed military miscreants jailed for infractions and violations. Narrated guided tram tours are available, depending on the season. Ferries to the island are available from Tiburon, Vallejo and San Francisco. For more information, call (415) 435-1915 (for ferry information press #2.)

China Camp State Park preserves the site of the Bay Area’s last Chinese shrimp-fishing village. Visitors can still see the sandy beaches where Chinese junks were launched, the piers where they unloaded their cargo, and the machinery used to process the shrimp. A metal conveyer-belt like device that processes the shrimp is still in operation and is demonstrated by docents on weekends. The last descendant of Chinese inhabitants, Frank Quan, still actively fishes the Bay. At times, visitors have the opportunity to meet him and see him work as his family did for generations. The park also features opportunities for hiking, windsurfing, boating, swimming, fishing, and bird-watching. China Camp is located four miles east of San Rafael and U.S. 101 on North San Pedro Road.

For more information, including exhibit hours, call (415) 456-0766 or (415) 893-1580.

Across the bay lies the **Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park**. Built in 1913 by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, this station was an integral part of a worldwide radio communication system. Today the stately buildings, designed after the Mediterranean buildings of Marconi's homeland, stand with their red tile roofs and expansive verandas awaiting restoration. Park visitors enjoy its rich history, hiking on trails through the Monterey pine forest and strolling through the gardens. Marconi operates as a full service Conference Center providing 40 lodging rooms, 5 meeting rooms and a delectable combination of Midwest and California cuisine. The park is located on Highway One, seven miles North of Point Reyes Station. For more information, call (415) 663-9020 or visit the web site at www.MarconiConference.org.

At **Mount Tamalpais State Park** visitors can find waterfalls and canyon trails. From mid to late spring, there are literally hundreds of small to medium waterfalls cascading down moss-covered, rocky slopes. Photographers from Ansel Adams to Jay Galloway have trekked through Mount Tam to photograph these secluded cascades. The park is especially popular with hikers and bicyclists. The park is located off Highway One between Mill Valley and Stinson Beach. For more information, call (415) 388-2070 or (415) 383-1100.

Olompali State Historic Park features representations of Native American Miwok village structures in an oak woodland forest up a hidden canyon accessible by a hiking trail. Models of original structures used by the Coast Miwok have been recreated on site by park staff and volunteers. They include a redwood bark roundhouse, "kotchas" (houses) made of tule and redwood bark, shade structures, an acorn granary, and a dance circle. The buildings are in the same area where the main village was located centuries ago. Visitors can still see the pitted grinding rocks that were used by the original inhabitants to grind acorns and seeds. Ask staff for directions to the village site. Olompali State

Historic Park is located three miles north of Novato on U.S. 101. For more information, call (415) 892-3383 or (415) 893-1580.

In **Samuel P. Taylor State Park** visitors can find the Pioneer Tree, one of the largest Redwood trees in Marin County. The Pioneer Tree Trail takes off from the Redwood Grove picnic area and ascends Bolinas Ridge on a very narrow and crooked trail that leads to the tree. The park is located 15 miles west of San Rafael on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. For more information, call (415) 488-9897 or (415) 893-1580.

Tomales Bay State Park features Heart's Desire Beach overlook and picnic area. This part of the park offers a 180-degree view of Tomales Bay from a site once inhabited by Coastal Miwok Native Americans. This little known, out-of-the-way "pocket picnic site" has secluded tables placed among huckleberry, pine and oak trees – with great views of the Bay. The area provides a place to relax between visits to Point Reyes National Seashore and other parks in the area. The park also features forests, fields, hills, meadows and swamps. Three hundred varieties of wildflowers attract botanists and flower lovers. One of the finest groves of Bishop pine in California is preserved in the park's Jepson Memorial Grove. The park is located four miles north of Inverness on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. For more information, call (415) 669-1140.

For more information about California State Parks, visit the website at www.parks.ca.gov.

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