

Van Damme State Park



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

MIKE CHRISMAN
Secretary for Resources

RUTH COLEMAN
Director, California State Parks



California State Parks does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at the phone number below. To receive this publication in an alternate format, write to the Communications Office at the following address.

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**Russian Gulch, Mendocino Headlands
and Van Damme State Parks**
P. O. Box 440 • Mendocino, CA 95460
(707) 937-5804

*Roaring sea caves,
a pygmy forest found
nowhere else on earth,
ocean views from
Victorian windows—
welcome to
Mendocino area
state parks.*

On the Mendocino coast, the air has a distinct fragrance of salt, and the crashing waves create a continuous resonance. The tall bluffs at this spot north of San Francisco resemble the rugged shores of the east coast, but with an unmistakable California flair. Victorian-era communities that overlook the sea reflect the New England roots of their builders who, in the ordinary course of life, added volumes to California's colorful history.

MENDOCINO AREA STATE PARKS

Two miles north of Mendocino, Russian Gulch State Park's collapsed sea cave cuts 200 feet into the headlands to form the boiling surge known as the Devil's Punchbowl. Mendocino is embraced on three sides by unmatched views of Mendocino Headlands State Park. Van Damme State Park, beginning at the mouth of the Little River, has a protected cove for divers, a fern canyon for hikers, and a unique forest of Mendocino pygmy cypress.

The climate here is temperate year-round. Winter rains and cool summer fogs that usually burn off by mid-morning provide the moisture necessary for the thriving coastal redwoods. Prepare for changeable weather by dressing in light layers.

MENDOCINO HISTORY

Native Americans

The Pomo date back about 3,000 years on the North Coast. Their main village of redwood bark houses was located at the mouth of the Big River. It is believed that when Russian and Aleutian fur trappers arrived here in the early 1800s, it was the Pomo's first contact with non-



Little River, Van Damme State Park

atives. The Pomo passed through on annual food gathering visits, but eventually settled year-round. They hunted large and small game, caught fish and shellfish, and gathered seaweed, acorns and various seeds. Whatever they could not obtain locally they acquired in trade with other groups; in times of plenty the groups often gathered to share the bounty.

When the Pomo were drawn into the mission system in the early 1800s, their way of life was forever altered. Within a generation or two, direct conflict and exposure to European diseases nearly decimated them. Today about 5,000 Pomo descendants, who still occupy parts of their ancestral lands, gather the raw materials to make some of the world's finest Native American baskets and to pass on this ancient skill to the next generation of artisans.

European and American Settlers

Settled by emigrants from all over the world, this area has a long history of entrepreneurial exploitation. In 1812 a ship owned by the Russian-American Company entered a cove beneath the bluffs of what would become

North America's southernmost Russian settlement, Fort Ross. In the 1830s the American and Hudson's Bay trappers passed through seeking beaver pelts. The Russian colony was a commercial failure, and in 1841 they sold out and left. The Fort Ross property had various owners, including John Sutter, and in 1906 the fort and some acreage were acquired by the State for restoration, reconstruction and interpretation of this era.

The Lumber Mills

In 1850 the *Frolic* sank off Point Cabrillo with its San Francisco-bound cargo. Salvagers were unsuccessful, but their disappointment was appeased by the nearby stands of redwoods. Within two years they had built a sawmill at the mouth of the Big River.

In 1864 Little River was founded as a mill town to supply lumber to build San Francisco. However, heavy logging diminished the local timber resources, and by 1893 the Little River Mill closed down. With the loss of the mill, businesses, services, and even the school were abandoned.

In the Russian Gulch area, the lumber trade consisted of several small mills that only operated for a short time. The area eventually became "logged over," but the pier was used for passengers and freight into the next century.





Van Damme sawmill

VAN DAMME STATE PARK

Van Damme habitats include marine, coastal beach, coastal bluff terrace, pygmy forest, redwood forest and riparian, with wetlands areas farther inland.

Bishop pine and coastal redwoods grow along the river. The Little River provides habitat for steelhead, coho salmon, stickleback, and both prickly and Coast Range sculpin. Red alder, willow, grand fir and western hemlock are

also part of the riparian plant community, and the park's Sitka spruces are thought to be at this species' southernmost limit. Yellow warblers, belted kingfishers, Swainson's thrush and northern spotted owls are among the local birds.

Park History

William H. Kent, the first permanent American settler in the area, joined the gold rush in 1850. In 1853 he went to work at the Little River sawmill and later bought land in the area now partially encompassed by Van Damme State Park. Between 1864 and 1893, lumber operations became Little River's commercial foundation, and the industry's land holdings came to include much of what is now the park.

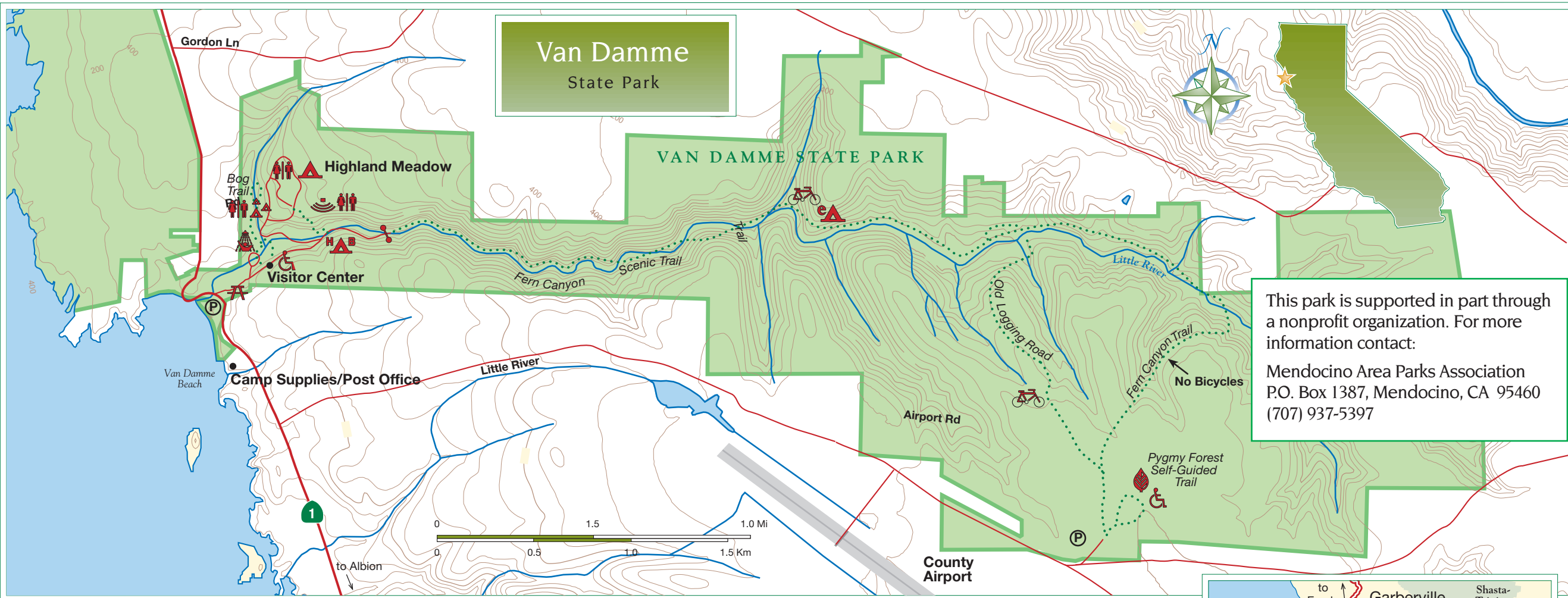
The panic of 1893—a five-year economic depression—hit the American west particularly hard. Of 156 national bank failures that year, 66 were in the Pacific states and western territories. By 1900 the mill operation was completely shut down.

The park was named for Little River native Charles Van Damme, son of Belgian immigrants who settled in the area. Charles became a

successful businessman in San Francisco, then returned to Little River to buy 40 acres of redwood forest to create public picnic and camping facilities. His will bequeathed this land to the State. In 1934 this acreage, combined with most of the upper Little River drainage lands, became Van Damme State Park.



Van Damme Visitor Center



This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information contact:
 Mendocino Area Parks Association
 P.O. Box 1387, Mendocino, CA 95460
 (707) 937-5397

PLEASE REMEMBER

- The water is bitterly cold, swift and unforgiving. Even on calm days, waves can overcome people standing at the water's edge or on rocks, and carry them out to sea.
- All features of the parks are protected by state law and may not be disturbed or collected.
- Anglers over the age of 16 must have a valid fishing license in their possession.
- Do not gather firewood or bring your own—most campgrounds have firewood for sale.
- Pets are welcome at most state parks, but must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet. In campgrounds they must be kept in a vehicle or in your tent at night.
- Driving off designated roads is not permitted
- State law requires that all bicycle riders under the age of 18 wear bicycle helmets.

Legend

	Paved road		Hike/Bike Campground
	Trail		Locked Gate
	Accessible Feature		Nature Trail
	Bicycle Trail		Parking
	Campfire Center		Picnic Area
	Campground		Restrooms
	Environmental Campground		Showers
	Group Campground		

