Año Nuevo State Park
Teacher's Guide

Elephant Seal Breeding Season

December 15 – March 31

California State Parks

The Año Nuevo State Park Teachers Guide is designed to provide you with information to successfully bringing your group to the park

Our hope is that, by drawing on the information provided, you will be able to tailor your individual class needs to achieve the most rewarding visit possible.

It is of the utmost importance that you fully realize you are entering a nature wildlife area and the potential dangers that presents.

Your attention to the safety aspects of this document is paramount.

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This *Guide* may be downloaded from the internet at
www.parks.ca.gov/AnoNuevo

Acknowledgements

This guide was researched, complied, written and edited by the following persons. Año Nuevo State Park wishes to thank each of them for their individual and collective contributions.

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Introduction

Fifty-five miles south of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge, a low, rocky windswept point juts out into the Pacific Ocean. This promontory was named Punta del Año Nuevo (New Year's Point) for the day Don Sebastian Vizcaino first sighted it on January 3, 1603.

Originally Año Nuevo was home to some of the first humans to inhabit the North American continent over 6000 years ago. Their village sites, in the form of kitchen middens, are still visible today. Año Nuevo was an important locale during the Spanish settlement period of the 1700's. Año Nuevo and its native peoples, the Quiroste, who are now known as part of the Ohlone, hosted explorers and missionaries such as Captain Gaspar de Portola and Father Juan Crespi. Originally pristine grassland along the San Mateo coast, Año Nuevo was converted to cattle ranches in support of the missionary system. Later it was converted to dairy farming in support of the cheese industry.

For the naturalist Año Nuevo holds a treasure chest of gems. Overhead the Harrier hawks are joined by kites and turkey vultures. There are over 300 species of birds that nest or visit during their migrations. Land mammals include bobcat, coyote, mountain lion, mule deer, bush rabbits and voles. Western fence lizards abound on the trail, the endangered San Francisco garter snakes and red legged frog make their homes in and around the pond. The vast *variety* of flora affords a "hands on" discussion of native versus invasive plant life.

Between December and late March, northern elephant seals come ashore to rest, mate and give birth on the beaches, sand dunes and nearby offshore island. The sight of huge males elephants seals battling for mating rights is a unique and unforgettable natural spectacle that thousands of visitors come to witness each year.

Año Nuevo State Park is truly a park of many faces…enjoy one aspect or touch on them all.

Welcome

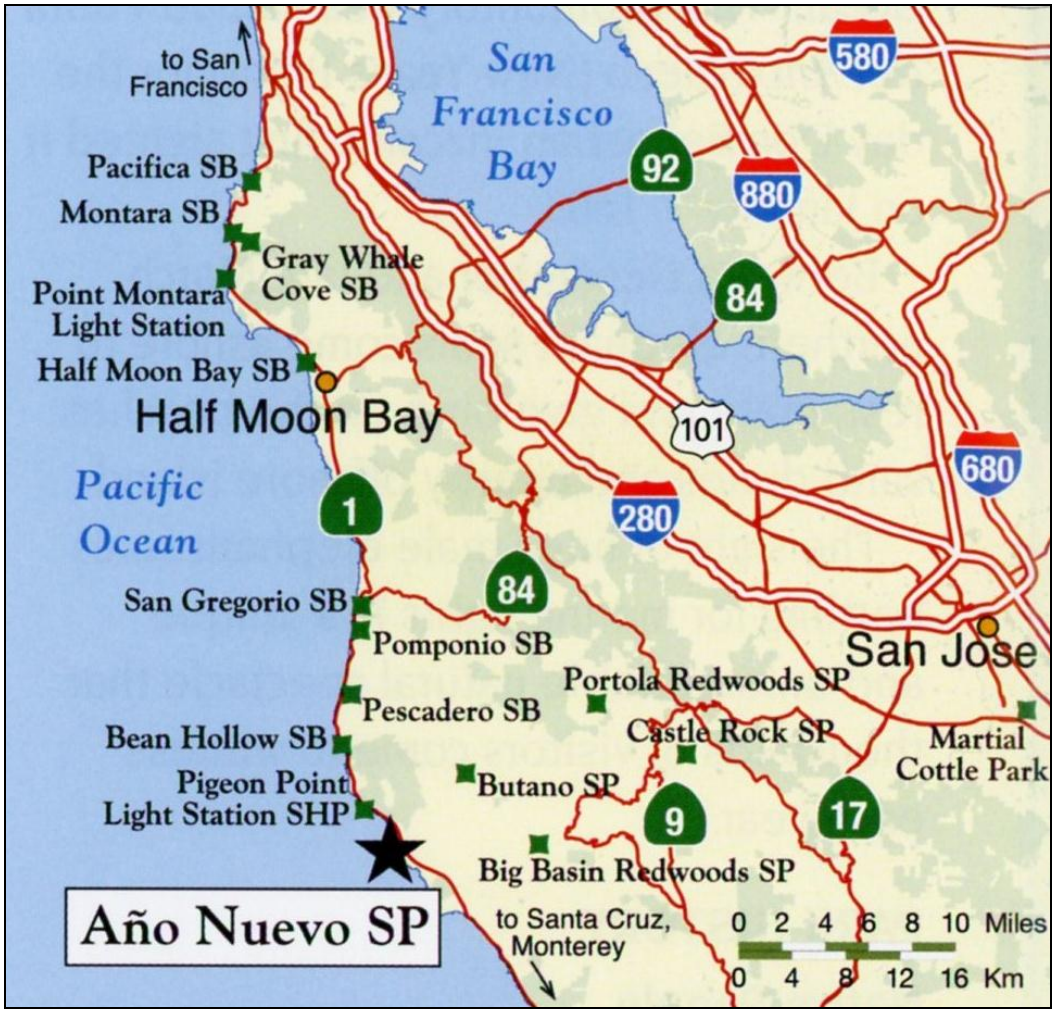
Mike Goodkind

Directions to Año Nuevo State Park

Año Nuevo State Park is located on Highway 1, approximately 20 miles north of Santa Cruz and 25 miles south of Half Moon Bay.

Travel time from San Francisco or the mid-peninsula is about 1.5 hours; from San Jose/South Bay Area about 1.25 hours; from East Bay is about 2 hours. Allow extra time during rainy/foggy or otherwise poor weather conditions.

Note: Weather conditions on the coast are almost always radically different than the Bay Area. Check your local weather sources before departure. Allow enough time for a safe journey.



Park Facilities

The buildings and surrounding grounds comprising the headquarters of Año Nuevo State Park were once part of the historic Dickerman/Steele Ranch known as the Cypress Dairy. In 2008 these buildings were restored and now serve visitors in a new capacity.

Marine Education Center (MEC**)** Once a dairy barn, it now contains educational displays about the elephant seals; the island foghorn/light station history; the bird, marine and land animals living within the park; the early Ohlone inhabitants; and the Steele family, who farmed the property through the 1950's.

The MEC also houses the park Bookstore. The store offers a variety of educational materials, souvenirs, light clothing, hats, some light rain gear and bottled water. NO FOOD IS SOLD IN THE PARK.

Theater Originally a horse barn, it is now a media center and meeting place. There is a continuous looped 30 minute video entitled "The Life of the Elephant Seal" as well as other interesting displays about the surrounding area.

Ranger Office The Creamery, where the Dickerman/Steele Family made their famous cheese now houses the Park Ranger Headquarters.

Drinking Water Visitors can find water fountains in the plaza formed by the Ranger Office, Theater and Marine Education Center. Other than the fountain at the main restroom building, these are the only water fountains in the park. Bottled water is sold in the bookstore.

Picnic Areas There are two main picnic areas. The larger of the picnic areas is located near the Marine Education Center. It has a commanding view of the park and Año Nuevo Island, Año Nuevo Bay. A second picnic area is located near the parking lot.

Restrooms Flush toilet restrooms are located near the parking lot. The staging area has two chemical toilets. There are NO RESTROOMS in the Natural Preserve.

School Group Tour Opportunities

Año Nuevo State Park is an amazing destination for school field trips. Teachers and students alike will find themselves immersed in a wild place just hours from their hometown classrooms. The park provides many educational opportunities to take what students learn in the classroom and give them the gift of real life examples outside of their textbooks. From wild marine mammals to sweeping landscapes of diverse ecosystems, Año Nuevo is the ultimate classroom waiting to be explored.

Año Nuevo's Natural Preserve area is available for tours year around. There are two distinct time periods in which visitation is allowed, the **Breeding Season** (Dec 15 through Mar 31) and the **Molting Season** (April 1 through Nov 30).

The Breeding Season

January 1 – March 31

The **Breeding Season requires reservations** and is by docent-guided tour only. Visitation is the highest during this season as this is when the elephant seals are most active. Those wishing to view the seals must be on a tour. Due to the tight schedules of seal tours, teachers are required to be aware of the materials in this manual and to make sure students are fully prepared.

The Molting Season

April 1-November 30

The **Molting Season does not require reservations and is self-guided.** During the spring, summer and fall months seals cluster along the beaches and molt their skin and fur. Docent guides may be requested by contacting the docent coordination office a minimum of two weeks in advance. There is no additional charge for the docent guide. The molting season receives fewer park visitors and allows more flexibility for school visits.

Breeding Season School Tours

December 15 – March 31

Located along a main migration route for Northern Elephant Seals, Año Nuevo State Park provides protected habitat for the seals. Every winter males and females descend on the beaches for their breeding season. Although mating intermittently occurs, it is often overshadowed by births, fights, sounds and the sheer number of animals covering the beaches. Visitors are able to explore selected areas of the natural preserve with a trained docent during this time.

Caution

Due to the physical nature and total time requirements (2.5 hours) of the 3 mile hike, **this program is not recommended for Kindergarten and Grade levels One and Two**. Chaperones should be advised that strollers and umbrellas are not permitted in the wildlife areas.

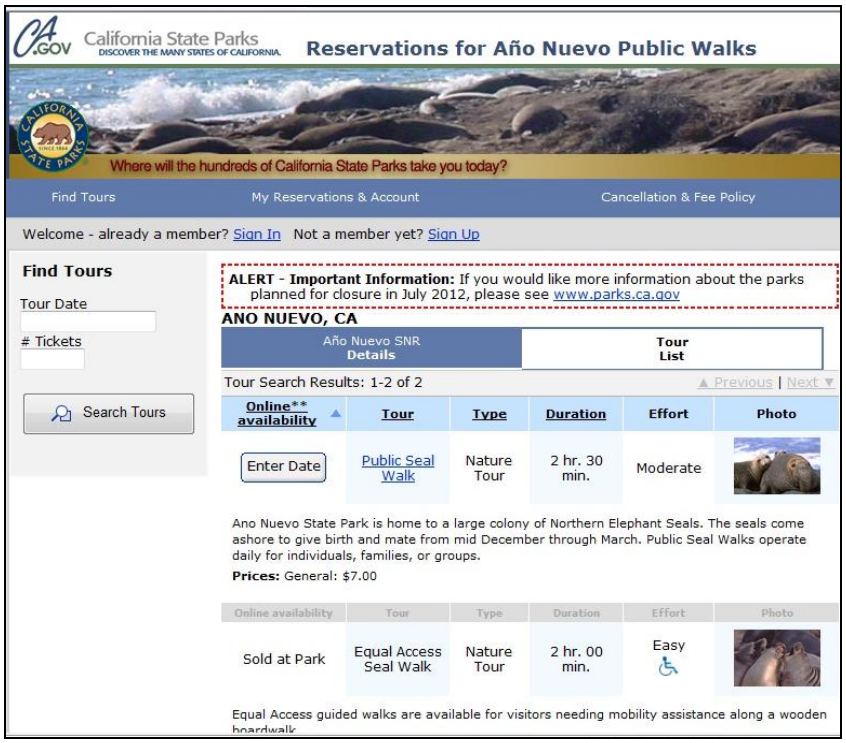
School Group Reservations

The Breeding Season guided tours are available from December 15 through March 31, except Christmas Day**. Reservations are required** via Reserve America to guarantee the tour, date, and time desired. School group tours begin at 9:45am with the last one leaving at 11:15 Monday through Friday.

School group reservations go on sale the first Saturday of October and are booked on a "first come-first serve" basis. Each caller may purchase up to four (4) School Group Tickets. Be advised that these tickets are very popular and are sold out quickly.

School group tickets are $21.00 per tour with a maximum of 22 people, including chaperones**.**

Reservations may be made by calling
Reserve America
1-800-444-4445
Or online
www.anonuevo.reserveamerica.com



Ticket Pickup

General information about the park is available on the Año Nuevo General Recorded information at (650) 879-0227.

Please plan to arrive at the guided walk ticket check-in at least 15 minutes before your walk time.

Bring with you your confirmation letter and a photo ID to pick up your tickets at the ticket window.

Tickets are not transferable and can only be picked up on the date of arrival.

Cancellations

All school ticket sales are final and are valid only for the date and time reserved. There are no refunds or exchanges unless the park cancels a walk. You'll be given as much notice as possible in the event of such a cancellation.

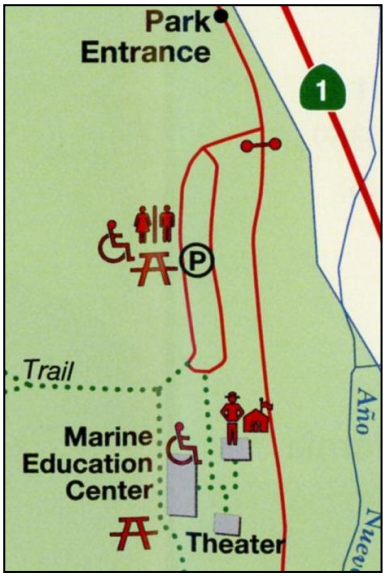
Walks take place rain or shine. However, if for any reason you decide not to use your tickets or know you will be arriving late, please notify the park at (650) 879-2025 as soon as possible.

Parking Fees

Parking for each vehicle is $10.00.

School groups arriving by school/charter bus are exempt from parking fees.

Arrival at the Park



Upon arrival at the Entrance Station please check in with your **letter of confirmation.** You will then proceed to the main parking lot to park. Bus parking is available in the designated spots.

The parking lot includes a picnic area, a water fountain, and restrooms, the only flush toilets on the premises.

The lower end of the parking lot leads to the Marine Education Center and another picnic area.

Please check in at the Marine Education Center as soon as possible.

The Tour Group

School group tours are broken into tour groups of 20 students plus two chaperones. **One chaperone for each ten students is required**: however, one chaperone for each five students is recommended. Please identify these groups before you arrive at the park.

Name tags with first and last name and name of school are helpful.

Before entering the Natural Preserve, each tour group will be provided an Año Nuevo Docent who will guide the group through the area, maintain safety and provide interpretative information about the park and its environment.

It is the responsibility of the chaperone(s) to maintain disciplinary control of the group and enforce the docent's instructions at all times. This is very helpful to docents and can increase the benefits of the tour.

Tour Intervals and Time Schedules

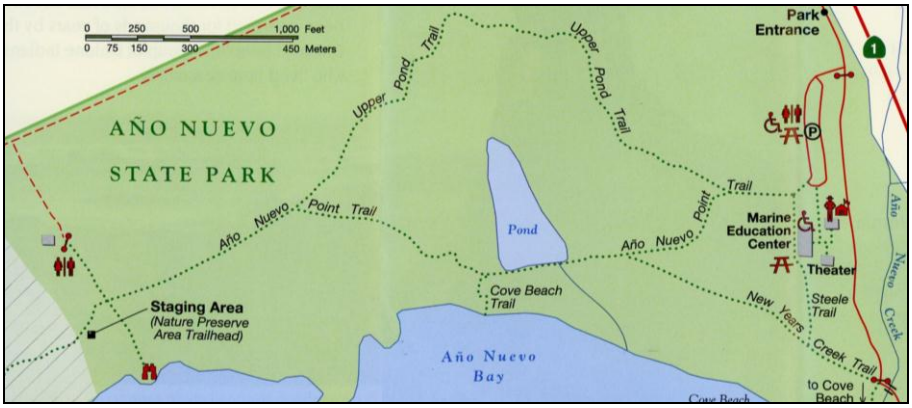
Elephant seal tours leave every 15 minutes and maintain a 15 minute separation throughout the entire tour. You and/or your chaperones are required to help your docent achieve these goals within your tour.

The tour is broken into three segments.

Segment 1: Marine Education Center to the Staging Area

- Approximately 1 mile.
- You are allotted 30 minutes to reach the staging area.
- The trail is hard pack gravel/dirt and will be muddy in rainy season.
- Hiker rating of 'moderate'

Note: Keep in mind that the staging area is the last possible restroom break for the next 2 hours. **Plan on reaching the staging area within 20 minutes after your Marine Education Center departure to allow for restroom use.**



Segment 2: Guided tour to the Elephant Seal Rookery and return to the Staging Area

- Ranges from 1 to 1.5 miles
- Trail is pack gravel and sand dunes
- Hiker rating of "moderate"
- Tour time in the preserve is 90 minutes.

Segment 3: Return to Parking Area

- Return to the parking area is the same 1 mile as on the way out to staging.
- Time allotted for the return is up to the group.

Note: The return time is often slower due to fatigue.

Staging Area

The Staging Area is located about half-way between the Marine Education Center and Año Nuevo Point. Groups pause here before they meet their docent naturalist and enter the natural preserve to begin the tour. While waiting for the tour to begin, students and teachers can discover several interpretive panels and objects on display.

Bathrooms are located nearby and are the last opportunity to use a bathroom for the next 90 minutes. Teachers are advised to encourage all students to visit the bathrooms before the tours starts. There are no bathrooms in the preserve.

Danger Alerts

Be aware of your surroundings at all times. You are in a "wild" environment. Be aware of possible sources of bodily injury.

1**. Stay 25 feet back from cliff edges**. Steep, unstable cliffs can crumble under your weight resulting in falls and serious injury.

2. **Respect the Sea**. Local waters are cold and rough. Lifeguards are not available. Beware of large waves that could knock you down and riptides that could sweep you out to sea.

3. **Poison Oak** grows along the trails leading to the natural preserve. Avoid touching the leaves and branches. The plant's oils will cause itching and blisters. If you suspect contact with poison oak wash the contacted area with COLD water and soap to remove as much of the oil as possible. Set aside any clothing as well to be washed.

4. **Ticks** are found throughout the park. Stay on trails and avoid brushing against plants. Check clothing frequently to brush off any "tick hitchhikers". Do a full body inspection when you return home.

What to Bring

Weather and trail conditions are a major component of your visit. The weather can easily change from the parking lot to the seal viewing area: the temperature can change by more than 20 degrees; winds can go from a light breeze to 25 mph; completely sunny to dense fog or rain. Preparing students on what to bring is one of the secrets to a successful Año Nuevo visit.

Clothing/Footwear

Warm, layered clothing and sturdy footwear are a must. The layered combination of t-shirt, sweater, hooded sweatshirt or hooded jacket, long pants, hat and rain resistant outer wear are recommended. Gloves and knit hats will help you stay warm.

Umbrellas are not allowed in the natural preserve. High winds can blow them away and endanger wildlife.

Footwear must be able to withstand gravel, mud, dirt and sandy surfaces. DO NOT ALLOW OPEN TOED SHOES OR SANDLES TO BE WORN. Waterproof footwear is recommended if rain is forcasted.

If rain if forecasted, consider bringing a “change of clothes & shoes” for the ride home. Travelling in wet clothing is not fun. Leave the change of clothes in the bus/car while on the tour.

Food & Drink

Food is not sold at the park. There are two picnic areas located near the parking lot and the Marine Education Center. Eating while in the natural preserve is prohibited. However, the staging area is a great place for snacking and is right before groups enter the preserve.

Water fountains are located near the parking lot restrooms and in the courtyard near the park office. Bottled water is available for sale in the bookstore. Carrying small quantities of water on the tour is recommended, especially on hot sunny days.

Consider bringing enough food/snacks/drinks to allow for a pre-tour snack and a post-tour snack. Most importantly, please make sure all trash is disposed of in the proper containers.

Backpacks

Backpacks should be kept to a minimum in weight and volume. Pack only what you really need.

Possible items would include:

- Binoculars
- Cameras
- Sunscreen
- Alternate clothing items (hat, gloves, sweatshirt)
- Small quantity of water
- Study guide/worksheets

What Not To Bring

All electronic devices are prohibited on the tour. Cell phones, CD players, iPods, etc. should be left in the bus/car.

Overall Trip Planning

Before bringing your class to Año Nuevo State Park, you may want to visit the park to become familiar with the area.

You will be on-site 4 to 5 hours.

Recommended time allotment considerations when you plan your trip…

1. Travel time to the park

2. Pre-tour activities (30 minutes to 1 hour)
   - Restroom break
   - Snack time
   - Marine Education Center exhibits
   - Park video
   - Visit park Bookstore (recommend making purchases post-tour so you don't have to carry extra items in your pack)

3. Tour (2 ½ to 3 hours hours)

4. Post-tour activities (30-45 minutes)
   - Snack time
   - Restroom break
   - Last visit to the Bookstore. (Note: Before going on your hike check to see when the store closes

Teacher Checklist

☐ Determine desired tour date

☐ Determine total number of people taking the tour
(Students + Chaperones + yourself)

☐ Recruit chaperones

☐ Contact the docent office if you want to arrange a docent led tour

☐ Arrange transportation by bus or private vehicles

☐ Issue parent consent form and student checklist to each student

☐ Prepare time line & responsibility checklist for your tour

☐ Prepare in school pre-tour lessons

☐ Review "Rules & Regulations" and "Danger Alerts" with students/chaperones the day of the tour.

☐ Review "What to Bring" and "What not to Bring" section with students the day prior to the tour. Provide parents with the lists for review with their children as part of the permission slip.

☐ Post tour review with students

Student/Parent Checklist

☐ Signed permission slip

☐ Prepare primary clothing/footwear (Dress in layers; clothes should be breathable as in cotton, multiple lighter layers are better than one heavy layer)

1. Jacket or Sweater with hood
2. Rain cover/coat (umbrellas are not allowed on trail)
3. Trail worthy shoes…water proof
4. Gloves
5. Hat

☐ Prepare "change of clothing/footwear"

What will get wet and need to be changed for a comfortable ride home?

☐ Prepare backpack items

1. Binoculars
2. Cameras
3. Sunscreen
4. Alternate clothing items (hat, gloves, sweatshirt)
5. Small quantity of water

☐ Prepare Snacks & Drinks (no food is sold at park, bottled water only, water fountain is available)

1. Lunch or snack before the tour.
2. Bottled water only during the tour
3. Lunch or snack after the tour

☐ Money for Bookstore visit

1. Not more than $10.00 recommended

☐ Review "What to Bring" and "What not to Bring" section with students

See teacher for list provided by the park or refer to park website.