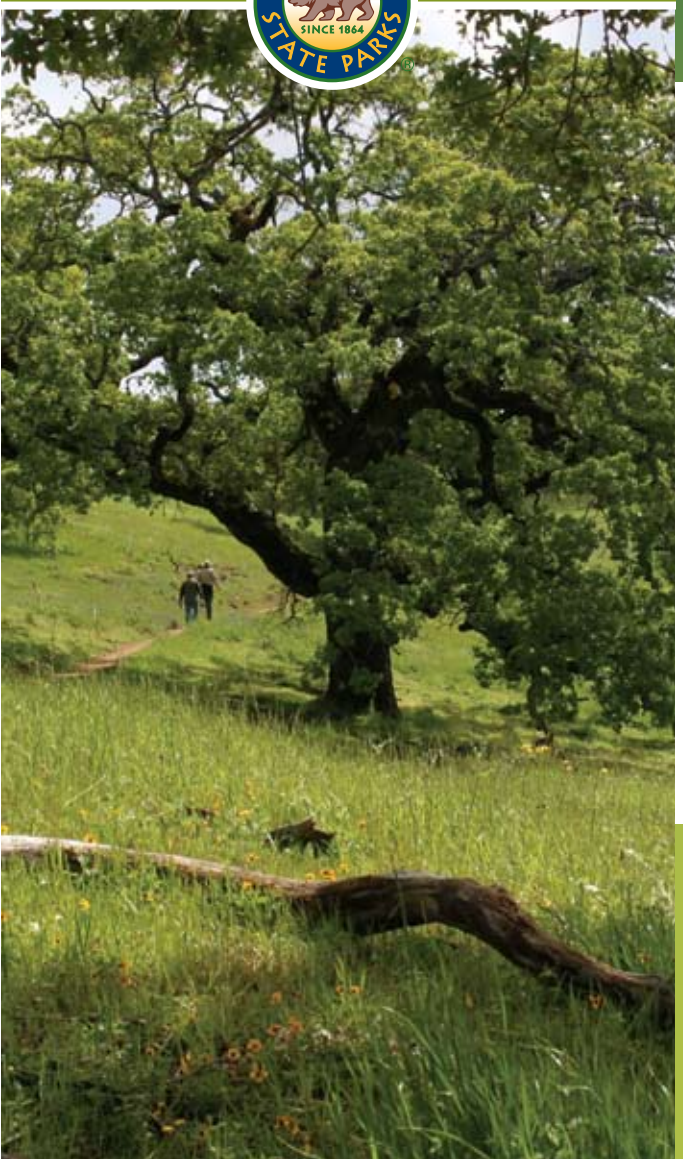
Henry W. Coe

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.

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Henry W. Coe State Park
9000 East Dunne Avenue
Morgan Hill, CA 95037
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This magnificent park greets visitors with miles of trails and many small lakes, ponds and seasonal creeks to lighten their path.

Barely an hour's drive southeast of San Jose, Henry W. Coe State Park protects and preserves 87,000 acres of scenic hills and mountain ridges. This wild, largely undeveloped park welcomes backpackers, equestrians, mountain bikers, day-hikers, and anyone seeking solitude in a nearly untouched setting. Part of the Diablo Range, the park is an amalgam of high ridges, plateaus, and both narrow and open valleys.

Scenic hill and mountain ridge views

After a rainy winter, wildflowers bloom in profusion from February through March; by April the color is rampant. The landscape is rich with blue lupine and orange-yellow California poppies, bright yellow gold fields and delicate baby blue eyes. Mariposa lilies, larkspur, blue dicks and Ithuriel's spear show themselves in late April and May. The variety and richness of the flora attract visitors from miles around.

Hot, dry summers bring highs above 90, cooling to the 50s at night. Hikers should carry—and drink—plenty of water, even on less-strenuous trails. Winter is wet, with highs in the 50s and lows in the 30s. In winter, seasonal creeks can overflow and become dangerously impassable. Spring and fall are the most temperate and enjoyable times to visit. Prepare for the variable climate and rugged landscape by dressing in layers.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

The indigenous people in this area probably included the Ohlone and the Northern Valley Yokuts. At the time of European contact, Ohlone territory extended from San Francisco Bay south to the Carmel Valley area, and east into the Diablo Range. The lower San Joaquin River and its tributaries formed the core of the Northern Yokuts homeland. The semi-permanent watercourses on the east side of the Diablo Range were sparsely inhabited. The native people were semi-nomadic, moving seasonally to harvest acorns, seeds, berries, roots and other foods vital to their diet. They hunted, fished, and periodically set fires to increase yields of certain plants, such as grass and seeds, and to maintain forage plants to attract game.

With the arrival of the Spanish, the Ohlone were recruited into the missions, ending their way of life. As native populations near the coastal missions dwindled, missionaries gathered converts from farther inland, reaching into the Diablo Range and ultimately the San Joaquin Valley. The strenuous mission routines, which were completely foreign to the native people's way of life, took a heavy toll on them. Unable to fight off new diseases brought by the Europeans, the native population was nearly decimated.

In 1834, when the Mexican government ordered the missions secularized, the promise to return the lands to the remaining mission Indians was not honored. Native people, now displaced from the missions and from their traditional homelands, were left to fend for themselves. Some found work on cattle ranches in the vicinity of today's park, herding cattle and the wild mustangs that populated the Orestimba South Fork near Mustang Flat. Today, Ohlone descendants—including members of the Muwekma, Rumsen and Mutsun groups—are working toward federal recognition.

THE COE LEGACY

Pine Ridge Ranch

New Hampshire native Henry W. Coe established the Willow Ranch in the Santa

Clara Valley in 1858 and acquired the San Felipe Ranch in the 1860s. This purchase brought Coe's sons, Henry Jr. and Charles, into the cattle ranching business. In the late 1880s and 1890s, the brothers acquired 6,000 acres in the Diablo Range. The combined Coe lands became the Pine Ridge Ranch. By 1932 Pine Ridge Ranch was being managed by the daughter of Henry Jr., Sada Sutcliffe Coe Robinson, and her husband Charles. When Henry Jr. died in 1943, Sada's brother Henry inherited the ranch. In 1949, a year after Henry sold the land to an investor, Sada bought it back. She deeded the ranch to Santa Clara County to be used as a park in 1953. In 1958 the county deeded the land to the State, which established Henry W. Coe State Park.

Coe Ranch Visitor Center entrance

Land that now makes up Henry W. Coe State Park was used for cattle grazing from the 1880s into the 1960s by various cattle ranchers. Still-existing roads, trails, ponds and fencing are among many features dating back to this period in the park's history. The adjacent Gill-Mustang, Coit and Redfern ranches were also acquired over the years. Henry W. Coe is Northern California's largest state park.

NATURAL HISTORY

The park is a series of craggy ridges as high as 3,560 feet, with deep canyons from about 300 feet above sea level to 710 at the north fork of Pacheco Creek. During heavy rain, three seasonal watersheds—Coyote, Orestimba and Pacheco creeks—can become whitewater torrents. Dozens of small lakes in the park were created by former ranchers; Mississippi Lake is the largest at about 32 acres.

Vegetation

Many of the park's trees—giant live oaks, large stands of blue oaks, and coast and canyon live oaks—are native to the area. Gray pines are found throughout the park and the stately ponderosa pine dominates the western ridges. Pacific madrone, western Sycamore, California bay laurel and California buckeye are plentiful. The beautiful, rounded growth of big berry manzanita can reach 20 feet in height. Grasslands alternate with chaparral on slopes, and riparian vegetation is prolific along the creeks.

Whispering Bells bloom in spring following a wildfire.

Wildlife

The backcountry shelters mule deer and elk. Raptors look for small prey such as mice and ground squirrels, while overhead golden eagles soar, glinting in the sunlight. Mountain lions seek deer, raccoons, black-tailed jackrabbits and brush rabbits, while bobcats, coyotes, and foxes seek many smaller mammals.

Birdwatchers will find common birds such as turkey vultures, Steller's jays, and California quail, and noteworthy birds like California thrashers and Lesser and Lawrence goldfinches. California king snakes and Pacific gopher snakes are harmless, but be wary of western rattlesnakes.

Fire in the Park

In September 2007, a massive wildfire burned more than half of the park. Called the "Lick Fire" for its proximity to the Lick Observatory, it burned for eight days. Fire experts describe this as a "mosaic" fire, meaning that damage was heavy in some areas, while other areas were barely touched. However, the seeds of many plant species need fire, and some even need smoke, to shock them into germination. Fire also clears out the highly flammable "duff," or debris that collects during non-fire years and poses fire danger during the hot, dry summers.

Lick Fire aftermath

Many wildfires have occurred at Coe during the park's history, but the evidence of such fires may be hard to see even a year later. Intensely burned areas, trees or other species might take years to regenerate, while some grasses and shrubs may quickly recover. Both responses to the ravages of fire can benefit a variety of wildlife and increase biodiversity. The aftermath of the Lick Fire will provide valuable information on fire recovery for many years to come.

RECREATION

Camping—Headquarters Campground is near the top of Pine Ridge and the visitor center. Some sites have panoramic views; others are beneath shady oaks. Each site has a picnic table and a fire ring. Sites not located beneath trees have shade ramadas. Considered primitive, the campground has piped spring water and nearby pit toilets, but no showers or hookups. Fires are allowed only in the fire rings in the campground; purchase firewood at the visitor center. Other supplies are not available in the park; the nearest town is Morgan Hill, 13 miles west of the park. For camping reservations, call 800-444-7275. First-come, first-served sites are often available; if no staff is at the gate, register and pay at the "iron ranger."

Day use—Coe Headquarters features early Pine Ridge Ranch buildings. The visitor center has ranching life exhibits, a bookstore, and a registration/information desk.

Hunting Hollow is a self-registration entrance with access to the southwest part of the park.

Dowdy Ranch offers access to the eastern part of the park and is open seasonally on weekends. Contact Coe Headquarters at (408) 779-2728 for information.

Gilroy Hot Springs was a place of healing. From the 1860s through the 1920s, the resort attracted San Francisco Bay area business leaders. In 1938, H.K. Sakata opened it as a respite for Japanese and Japanese Americans to heal from the stress of hard work and social pressures. This State Historic Landmark is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Call (408) 779-2728 to arrange a tour.

Hiking/Mountain Biking—The park's 250 miles of dirt roads and trails are in various states of development; a few are off-limits to mountain bikes. Some are wide and relatively smooth; others are narrow and rutted. Trails are generally well maintained, particularly near headquarters, and are well signed. Call for trail conditions.

Backpacking—The park has exceptional opportunities for backpackers. The Orestimba Wilderness is a very popular destination for multi-day trips. Water sources may be far apart, depending on the season. Inquire at the visitor center about which springs are running, and purify all water.

Lakeside camping and fishing

Poppies beautify the landscape.

Backcountry permits are required and are printed on the back of entry fee receipts.

Fishing—Fishing for largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie and green sunfish is excellent, though none of the park's lakes, streams or ponds can be reached by vehicle. Round-trip hikes can be 10 miles or more.

Horses—The backcountry provides serene, peaceful rides and beautiful views. Longer trips or horse camping involve rugged and steep terrain.

Special Events—Many family-oriented walks, programs and events take place in spring, summer, and fall. See details listed at **http://www.parks.ca.gov**

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

One campsite in Headquarters Campground is accessible. For accessibility updates, call the park or visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Fremont Peak State Park, San Juan Canyon Road, off of Hwy. 156, San Juan Bautista (831) 623-4526
- San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, in San Juan Bautista at 2nd and Washington Streets (831) 623-4881

Henry W. Coe State Park

Legend

- Freeway
- Major Road
- Paved Road
- Trail: Hiking
- Trail: Hiking and Bicycle
- Trail: Hiking, Horse, and Bicycle
- Parking Area
- Wilderness Area
- Accessible Feature
- Bicycle Trail
- Campground
- 1 - 20 Campsite Numbers
- Group Campground
- Hiking Trail
- Horse Campground
- Locked Gate
- Park Building
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Trailhead
- Visitor Center

HENRY W. COE STATE PARK

ORESTIMBA WILDERNESS (Hiking and Horses Only - No Bicycles)

PRIVATE PROPERTY

Coe Headquarters Park Entrance/ Visitor Center

Dowdy Ranch Area/ Visitor Center

Coyote Creek Park Entrance

Hunting Hollow Park Entrance

Gilroy Hot Springs

Coe Park Campground Detail

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For more information contact: Pine Ridge Association 9100 East Dunne Ave., Morgan Hill, CA 95037 www.pineridgeassociation.org

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