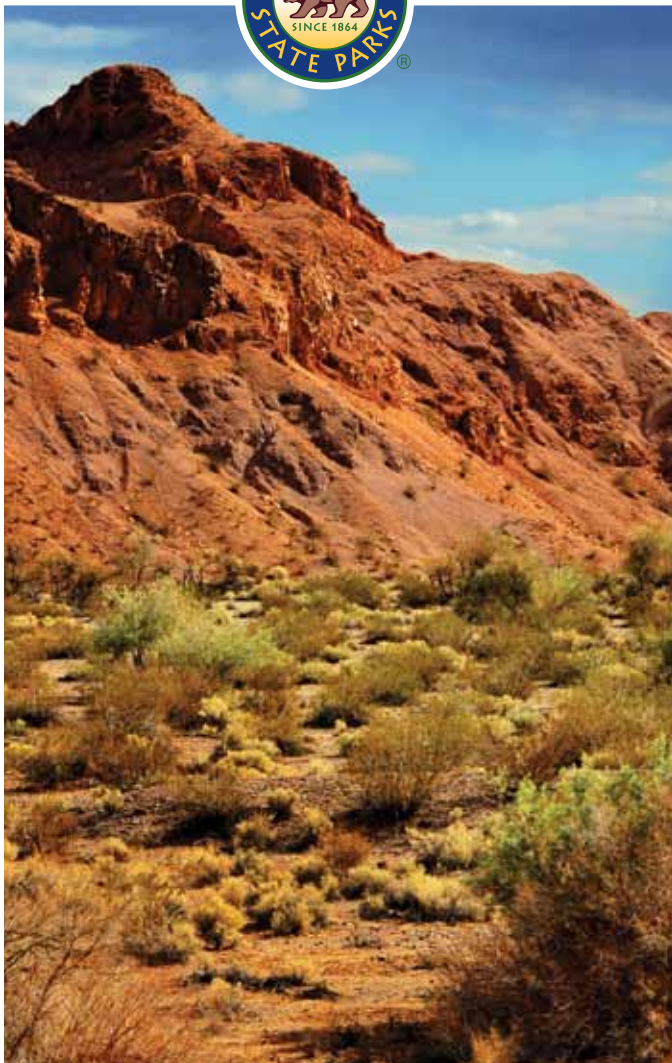


# Picacho

## State Recreation Area



### Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks 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.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (760) 996-2963. This publication can be made available in alternate formats. Contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov) or call (916) 654-2249.

#### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

Discover the many states of California.™

#### Picacho State Recreation Area

Interpark Road at Picacho Road

33.023089, -114.609885

Winterhaven, CA 92283

(760) 996-2963 or (760) 393-3059

© 2005 California State Parks (Rev. 2013)

*Rich in natural wonders,  
the park is a winter and  
springtime haven for  
campers, anglers, hikers  
and those who love a  
desert landscape.*



**I**n the lower Colorado River Basin 25 miles north of Yuma, Arizona, Picacho State Recreation Area lies along the Colorado River on California's southeastern border. The park's remote setting beckons hardy adventurers to enjoy year-round fishing and water sports. However, Picacho's climate can be extreme—ranging from a low of 20 degrees in winter to as high as 120 degrees in summer. The best times to visit are from mid-October through April.

The Picacho adventure begins with its 24-mile Picacho Road approach, which is paved only for the first six miles. The next 18 miles, composed of rough dirt, are usually passable for cars and vehicles towing small trailers. However, sudden flash floods sparked by summer showers have been known to temporarily flood parts of this road. As would be the case with any desert location, visitors are reminded to carry extra water, fuel and other essential supplies.

### **PARK HISTORY**

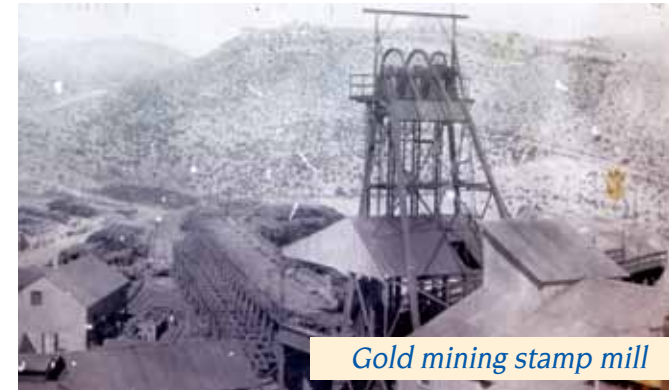
For thousands of years, the Quechan and other native people of the Great Basin culture lived along this part of the Colorado River—the western fringe of the much larger Southwest Indian culture area. Picacho Peak was important in Quechan myth and legend, much of which was passed from generation to generation in narrative song

cycles. The people crossed the river on logs, rafts, and in shallow clay vessels, traveling as far as the coast and the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley to trade with other groups. Though they hunted and gathered as other native people did, they were also sophisticated agriculturists who cultivated wild plants, set controlled fires to replenish the land, and planted corn, beans, squashes and other crops to supplement their diet.

Today the federally recognized Quechan—one of California's largest inland native groups—consist of about 3,000 people, many of whom still speak their native language.

In 1540 Spanish soldiers, under command of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, traveled as far west as the Colorado River Basin. Other early contacts by the Spanish were more or less friendly, but a later attempt to establish a mission and settlement at Yuma in 1781 met with failure when the Indians rose up and destroyed the mission, killing all of the Spaniards.

Over the years, some people had successfully mined nuggets out of the desert sands. However, around 1862 José Maria Mendivil—a young prospector from Sonora, Mexico—discovered gold in the hard rock surrounding Picacho Peak. By 1890 a successful, large-scale gold mining operation was booming, and Picacho became a mining



*Gold mining stamp mill*

town. At the turn of the 20th century, steam-powered paddlewheel boats traveling the lower Colorado River delivered mining supplies and passengers to Picacho.

Visitors can hike to the ruins of the mine and mill sites from the trailhead near the Lower Dock day-use area.

### **NATURAL HISTORY**

#### **Vegetation**

The seemingly empty landscape actually teems with vitality and growth, forming habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. Even in the most barren places, plants take root and thrive in their own specialized ways.

In the spring, the rugged mountains and washes of the Colorado Desert come alive with acres of wildflowers, blossoming beavertail cactus and ocotillo.

Marsh tule and carrizo cane line the numerous backwater lakes near the river, and the oasis-like flats are invaded by non-native tamarisk trees. Desert ironwood, palo verde,





cottonwoods, willows and mesquite are among the area's native plants.

### Wildlife

The Sonoran Desert abounds with wildlife. Bald and golden eagles soar above, while the handsome, ground-dwelling Gambel's quail sings its entire repertoire. Swallows, great blue herons, snowy egrets, gila woodpeckers, phainopeplas, greater roadrunners and white-winged doves flock in large numbers. Thousands of migratory waterfowl—ducks, geese, ibis and cormorants—appear in spring and fall.

The park is also home to desert bighorn sheep, coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, mountain lions, southern mule deer, antelope ground squirrels and feral burros. Near the river, muskrats and beavers can be seen; throughout the park, visitors find a variety of lizards, snakes and amphibians. Mosquitoes are active from March through October. Wear protective clothing and use repellent.

### RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Camping**—The main campground, located in the eastern section of the park, has 54 primitive campsites, a group campground, and two boat-in group sites. The sites have picnic tables and fire rings with drinking water and chemical toilets located nearby, and a solar shower. Upriver are



Greater roadrunner

five smaller campgrounds with no available drinking water.

**Canoeing and Kayaking**—Autumn and early spring are best for a peaceful float down this scenic stretch of the Colorado River.

**Fishing**—Black bass, channel and flathead catfish, striped bass and bluegill are the fish most commonly taken from the river here.

**Boating**—Shallow draft powerboats, canoes and kayaks carefully navigate the Colorado River's shifting sandbars. Waterskiing and swimming are popular summer activities.

**Exploring (4WD and Hiking)**—The area's complex geology invites exploration of such sights as the plug dome volcanic outcropping at Picacho Peak—formed when viscous lava hardened over and around a volcanic vent. Many other land features tell the story of both ancient and fairly recent volcanic activity.

**Four-wheel-drive vehicles must be legal for highway use in California, and all drivers must be licensed.**

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Three campsites at the main campground are accessible; some other sites with large, flat firm pads are usable.
- Four vault toilets and path of travel (in dry weather) are accessible from nearby designated campsites; there is currently no accessible shower in this campground.
- Accessible picnic sites (some shaded) and chemical restrooms are at the Upper Dock; vault restrooms at the Lower Dock launch;
- Vault restrooms and one campsite at Taylor Lake and two vault restrooms at Carrizo Boat-in Camp are accessible.

Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### NEARBY STATE PARK

- Salton Sea SRA, 100-225 State Park Road North Shore, CA 92254 (760) 393-3059

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Summer temperatures can reach 120 degrees; know your physical limits in this rugged terrain.
- Keep your gas tank full; carry a spare tire. Stock your vehicle with extra water, a shovel, tools and blankets.
- If your vehicle breaks down, STAY WITH IT. A vehicle is easier to find than a wandering person.
- Each campsite accommodates up to 8 people and 3 licensed vehicles. Reservations are not necessary, but please self-register for your selected site within 15 minutes of your arrival.
- Vehicles must be California street-legal. Off-highway vehicles are not allowed in the park. All vehicles must remain on designated roads.
- Do not gather wood for fires; decayed vegetation enriches the desert soils.
- Loud noise and music are prohibited.
- Dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet and confined to your tent or vehicle at night.

