

# Picacho State Recreation Area



## 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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### Picacho State Recreation Area

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



## In the lower Colorado River Basin

### 25 miles north of Yuma, Arizona,

Picacho State Recreation Area lies invitingly along the California side of the Colorado River. Rich in natural wonders, the park is a winter and spring haven for campers, anglers, hikers, and those who love a desert landscape.

Picacho's climate can be extreme, ranging from 20 degrees in winter to as much as 120 degrees in summer. The weather from mid-October through April is ideal, but the park's remoteness invites hardy adventurers to enjoy year-round fishing and water sports.

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



*The Colorado River cuts through the rugged scenery of the park.*

in shallow pottery 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 it, killing all of the Spaniards.

The Pacheco family and others 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. At the turn of the 20th century, steam-powered paddlewheel boats traveling the Lower Colorado River delivered mining supplies and passengers, and the town had grown significantly.

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

### NATURAL HISTORY

#### Plant habitat

The seemingly empty landscape is actually teeming 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 and blossoming beavertail cactus and ocotillo. Marsh tule and carrizo cane line numerous backwater lakes near the river, and the oasis-like flats are taken over by invasive, non-native tamarisk trees. Desert ironwood, palo verde, cottonwoods, willows and mesquite are among the area's native plants.

#### Wildlife

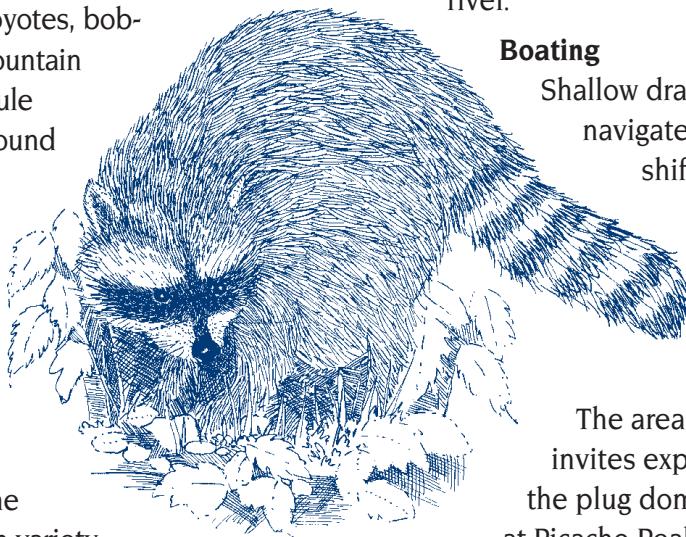
The Sonoran Desert is abundant with wildlife. During the spring and fall thousands of migratory waterfowl—ducks, geese, ibis and



*Striped bass are plentiful at the park.*

cormorants—appear. Bald and golden eagles soar above, while the handsome, ground-dwelling Gambel's quail sings its repertoire of songs. Swallows, great blue herons, snowy egrets, gila woodpeckers, phainopeplas, greater roadrunners and white-winged doves are found in large numbers.

The park is also home to desert bighorn sheep, coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, mountain lions, southern mule deer, antelope ground squirrels and several species of mice, as well as feral burros. Near the river, muskrats and beavers are sometimes seen, and throughout the park there is a rich variety of lizards, snakes and amphibians. Biting insects occur 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 there are five smaller campgrounds (no drinking water is available).

### Canoeing and Kayaking

The idyllic days of autumn and early spring are the best times 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 this part of the river.

### Boating

Shallow draft powerboats carefully navigate the Colorado River's shifting sandbars, and 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, and the many other land features that tell the story of both ancient and fairly recent volcanic activity.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- One designated site at the main campground. Some other sites with large, flat, firm pads are usable.
- Chemical toilet and path of travel (in dry weather) from nearby accessible campsite. There is currently no accessible shower in this campground.
- Picnic sites (some shaded) and chemical restrooms at Upper and Lower Dock boat launch areas.

Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, call the park, or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>

## 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.
- Campsites can accommodate 8 people and 3 licensed vehicles. Reservations are not necessary—please self register for your selected site within 15 minutes of your arrival.
- Vehicles must be street legal (off-highway vehicles are prohibited) and must be operated only 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 6 feet, and in your tent or vehicle at night.

