

News Release



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Rogers Family Horses Return To Will Rogers State Historic Park

PACIFIC PALISADES – The Rogers family has donated two of its horses to live at Will Rogers State Historic Park, helping visitors learn the story of one of America’s most beloved humorists through the ranch he built in the mountains above Los Angeles.

One of the horses, “Opossum,” was the favorite horse of Jim Rogers, the late son of Will Rogers. The horse bears the Rogers family brand. It was donated by Judy Rogers, Jim Rogers’ widow, and came from their ranch near Bakersfield.

Judy Rogers traveled with the horse when it was brought to the park today.

“This brings a new connectivity to Will Rogers, the park and its visitors,” said State Parks Topanga Sector Superintendent Steve White. “These are the first Rogers family horses in this park in many years.”

The 186-acre Will Rogers ranch was donated to the state by the Rogers family in 1944 after Will Rogers’ widow, Betty Rogers, died. Will Rogers was killed in a plane crash in Alaska in 1935.

The two horses donated by the Rogers family will live in Mitt Canyon, not far from the main visitor area of the park. State Parks is currently studying other possible equine programs for the park. The park already includes horse trails popular with people who bring their horses in by trailer or ride in from the adjacent neighborhood.

The Will Rogers Cooperative Association, which helps support the park through donations, volunteers and other services, has offered to pay for the first six months of care for the two donated horses, including the hiring of a groom. In the meantime, State Parks is exploring a permanent arrangement for keeping the horses at the park.

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Over the years, the park has been home to a number of horses, including privately-owned horses that were boarded in the park for a fee. In recent years, the number of boarded horses at the park reached 45. Last year those horses were removed as the state prepared to begin a major rehabilitation of the park, and an ongoing study of the impact of boarded horses on the park's facilities.

The \$5.3-million renovation effort began last November and includes major work at the 31-room ranch house, stables, blacksmith shop and hay barn, and restoration of the flagstone patio and walkway surrounding the main house.

While the ranch house is closed during the renovation, the remainder of the park is open, including the stable and corral areas, riding ring, roping arena, polo field and riding and hiking trails that offer visitors spectacular views of the region. It is anticipated the home will reopen to public tours late next year.

The ranch buildings and grounds are maintained as they were when the Rogers family lived there in the late 1920s and 1930s. The living room of the main ranch house, with a collection of Indian rugs and baskets, features a porch swing in the center of the room and a mounted calf, which was given to Will Rogers to encourage him to rope the calf instead of his friends. The north wing of the house contains the family bedrooms, the study, and the sunroom.

The park also includes trails that lead to spectacular views of the countryside around the park. Since Will Rogers State Historic Park is on the tip of the Santa Monica Mountains, the trails offer vistas of both the sea and the mountains. Visitors can hike to Inspiration Point or take the Rogers trail around the perimeter of the park. Will Rogers State Historic Park is the beginning of the Backbone Trail that traverses the entire Santa Monica Mountain range.

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