Big Basin Redwoods

State Park

Our Mission

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P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

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Save The Redwoods LEAGUE®

SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Big Basin Redwoods State Park
21600 Big Basin Way
Boulder Creek, CA 95006
(831) 338-8860

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"These trees, because of their size and antiquity, were among the natural wonders of the world and should be saved for posterity."

–Andrew P. Hill, 1899

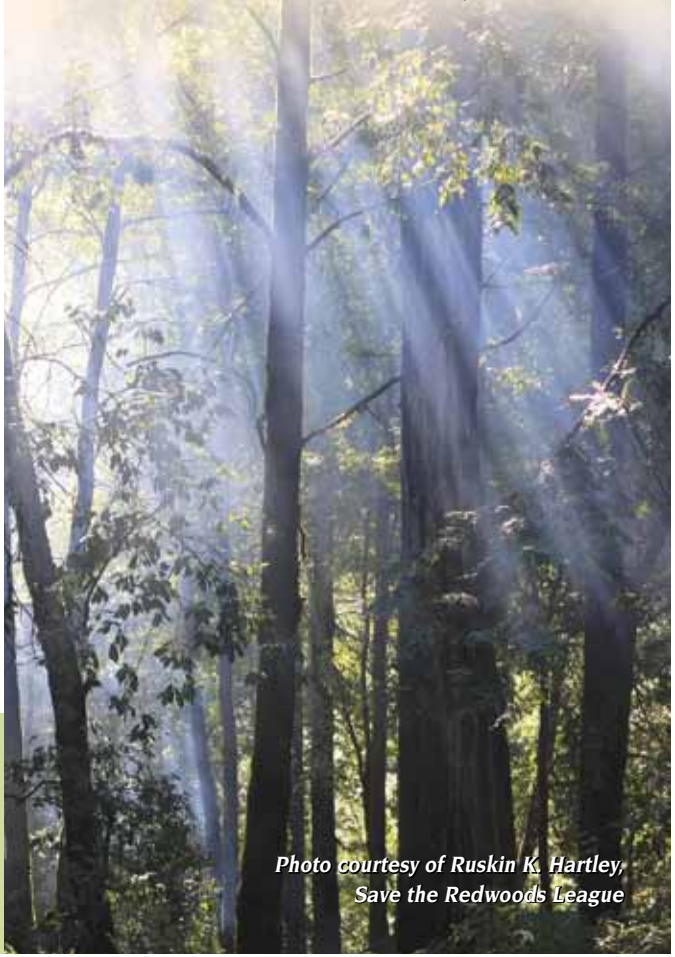


Photo courtesy of Ruskin K. Hartley, Save the Redwoods League

Superlatives define Big Basin Redwoods State Park in the Santa Cruz Mountains. California's oldest state park—covering more than 18,000 acres from sea level to more than 2,000 feet elevation—launched the state park movement in California.

Big Basin's biggest attraction—literally—is a rare stand of awe-inspiring, ancient coast redwoods that are among the tallest and oldest trees on Earth. Some measure close to 300 feet tall and 50 feet in circumference. Scientists estimate that these trees may range from 1,000 to 2,000 years old.

Spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean, lush waterfalls, more than 80 miles of roads and trails, and a fascinating natural and cultural history have beckoned millions of visitors to Big Basin since 1902.

NATIVE PEOPLE

Humans lived in or near Big Basin for at least 10,000 years before the Spanish explored the area in the late 1700s. The Big Basin area was home to the Cotoni and Quiroste Indians, two of the 50 tribes composing the Ohlone culture of the San Francisco and Monterey Bays.

The natural bounty of this area's varied microclimates provided well for early hunter-gatherers. Evidence of this includes grinding rocks, where their ancestors pounded acorns into flour. Today's park land was the interior food basket for coastal people, yielding a variety of berries, including toyon and huckleberries, and nut crops such as buckeye and hazelnuts. Fern parts were used in basketry. The Quiroste and Cotoni extracted nuts from bay trees for medicinal purposes.

They harvested soap root and other bulbs (eaten like potatoes), adding to a diet that included game, birds and steelhead trout. They also used selective hunting strategies for browsing animals such as elk, pronghorns and mule deer. Native people managed the landscape so that it would produce plentiful food. Their methods included controlled fires to promote seed growth, which also attracted wildlife to hunt.

Sawmill, 1900

THE REDWOODS

Big Basin's coast redwoods, *Sequoia sempervirens*, are native to the United States, growing only along the coast from southern Oregon to Central California. The name *Sequoia* may honor Sequoyah, the 19th-century inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, and *sempervirens* means "ever living." These trees are part of a once-huge ancient forest of which less than five percent remains. The redwood is California's official state tree.

Sempervirens Club with the famous Father of the Forest tree, 1901

The Santa Cruz redwood forest was first noted in accounts of a Spanish coastal expedition led by Gaspar de Portolá in 1769. Less than a century later, logging to meet the demands of the gold rush and urban development threatened to deplete the forest. By 1884, the area's 28 sawmills were processing more than 34 million board feet of lumber, shingles, railroad ties and posts annually.

PARK HISTORY

As early as 1852, Californians argued to save the Santa Cruz coast redwoods. In the 1880s, coast redwood-covered land usually sold for $15 an acre. In 1882, settler Tom Maddock and his 11-year-old son built a home from a single redwood tree on their 160-acre claim of virgin forest, purchased for just $7.50. The Maddock cabin burned in the 1950s; its site is marked with interpretive panels along the Skyline to the Sea Trail.

Newspaper editor Ralph S. Smith, a San Mateo County native, championed the idea of a redwood state park not only for tourism, but also for science. In March 1901, a State bill created California Redwood Park (renamed Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 1927).

The bill also established the California Redwood Park Commission. In 1906, after much debate, the commission acquired 3,901 acres from the Big Basin Lumber Company through purchase and donation. Another 3,785 acres were converted from federal land to the state park in 1916. Currently comprising more than 18,000 acres, the park continues to grow through partnerships with private nonprofit groups like the Save the Redwoods League and the Sempervirens Fund.

The fragile ecosystem supports a variety of life. Top to bottom: false turkey tail fungus, wild azalea, banana slug.

Sentiments about "using" the park have changed over the years, from initially preserving the pristine forest to the resort-use era of the 1930s to the 1950s. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps cut down redwoods to build the Nature Lodge, Park Headquarters, campfire center, a footbridge, cabins, stoves and trails.

Today, preservation of the park's natural wonders has returned to the forefront. The emphasis is preservation of the forest's entire ecology, with its significant geologic features, wildlife corridors and massive watershed.

NATURAL HISTORY

Ecology and Vegetation

Some redwoods measure more than 300 feet tall and 50 feet in circumference. However, with no taproot, redwood trees rely on a network of far-reaching roots about six feet deep, intertwined with those of other redwoods. Soil compaction is a danger to these roots.

Knob cone pine, Douglas-fir, red alder, madrone, chinquapin and buckeye also grow here. The forest's tanoak tree bark once provided tannin for local leather tanneries. Huckleberry, azaleas, ferns, manzanita, Indian paintbrush, poppies and wild orchids dot the park.

Wildlife, Geology and Climate

Foxes, coyotes and bobcats live throughout the park. Banana slugs feed on organic matter, plants and mushrooms on the forest floor. Newts, lizards and frogs are bountiful in the coast's damp, moist climate.

California quail, brown creepers, various woodpeckers, owls and flickers are some common bird species found in the park.

Be alert for rattlesnakes, poison oak and ticks. Use caution if you see a mountain lion; report aggressive encounters to park staff.

Geologically, the park's rock formations are a "Franciscan assemblage"—outcrops of serpentinite, basalt, limestone, ribbon chert, graywacke sandstone and shale.

Each season offers a different park experience. The intense greens of mosses contrast with the subtle colors of lichens and mushrooms during wet winters. Rushing waterfalls and wildflowers abound in the cool, foggy spring. Find a shady getaway from inland heat in summertime. Fall offers pleasant weather without storms, pests or extreme heat.

Climate change affects the redwood forest. Coast redwoods receive much of their water and nutrients from fog drippings. A 2010 University of California, Berkeley study found that the coast now has 75% fewer foggy days than it did a century ago. Mature redwoods can survive, but fewer foggy days mean fewer seedlings mature into trees.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

A year-round activity schedule can be found on the park's two cooperating association websites, shown on the map. The park's Nature Lodge has exhibits and historic park

photographs. The coastal Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center offers guided tours; call (831) 427-2288.

Camping—146 family campsites, four group camping sites, tent cabins, along-trail backpacking camps and horse camping are available. For complete camping options and reservations, visit **www.parks.ca.gov** or call (800) 444-7275. Trail camps are open by reservation only; for trail camp information, call (831) 338-8861. For horse camping at Rancho del Oso, call (831) 425-1218.

Trails—Big Basin's 80 miles of roads and trails introduce visitors not only to the redwoods, but to the park's different habitats and plants. Guided hikes are scheduled.

Interpretive programs at the campfire center

The easy stroller- and wheelchair-accessible Redwood Loop Trail winds a half-mile through the ancient redwood environment. Visitors can see Opal Creek, as well as some of the larger old growth trees, a redwood ring, and the giant Mother and the Father of the Forest trees.

The 33-mile Skyline to the Sea Trail runs from Castle Rock State Park through Big Basin to Waddell Beach at Rancho Del Oso. During the winter, seasonal bridges on the Skyline to the Sea Trail are removed when Waddell Creek is high.

Sempervirens Falls

Rated moderate, the 4.7- to 7.5-mile Shadowbrook Trail passes spectacular Sempervirens Falls. A strenuous hike on the Berry Creek Falls Trail passes many of the largest old-growth redwood trees, Berry Creek and its three waterfalls.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Restrooms and showers are accessible. Eight campsites and three tent cabins are also accessible. The main picnic area has accessible tables, parking, routes of travel and restrooms. Several trails are accessible, as are the main Visitor Center, the park headquarters, and the Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center and restrooms. For more information, visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

PLEASE REMEMBER

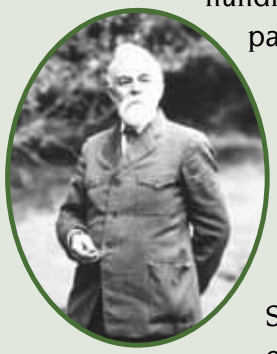
- All natural and cultural features in the park are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed. Collecting is prohibited, including down wood. Purchase firewood at the park store.
- Feeding wildlife is prohibited by law.
- Be prepared for mosquitos in summer.
- Lock all food inside vehicles and recycle glass, plastic and aluminum. Please secure food items at all times and dispose of trash properly.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not allowed on trails, unpaved service/fire roads, in any portion of the Rancho del Oso area or Waddell Beach at any time.

THE MARBLED MURRELET, a seabird about the size of a robin, is a redwoods inhabitant listed as endangered in California and threatened in the U.S. The murrelet nests high on a limb in the redwood canopy, hundreds of feet above ground. The bird travels up to 30 miles at dawn and dusk to feed on herring, smelt or anchovies as it swims through the ocean. The murrelet parents trade off for morning and evening feeding; the mother hatches only one chick per year. Marbled murrelet eggs and babies are prey to the park's *corvids*—jays, crows and ravens. They are first attracted to food or scraps left by humans, and then the corvids notice the murrelet nests high in trees.

Photo Courtesy of Rich MacIntosh

BIG BASIN: CALIFORNIA'S OLDEST STATE PARK

The establishment of Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 1902 marked the beginning of the preservation and conservation movement in California and provided the vision for the hundreds of California state parks we enjoy today.



Andrew P. Hill 1915 self-portrait

In 1899, San Jose photographer Andrew P. Hill photographed the coast redwood trees in Felton Grove, now part of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. The then-owner of the forest accused Hill of trespassing and demanded his negatives. Hill refused and left, vowing to himself to save the trees for future generations and "make a public park of this place."

In 1900, Hill gathered many staunch supporters to tour the area. After three days of exploring the forest's wonders, the group collected $32, elected officers and formed the Sempervirens Club. The Club changed its name to the Sempervirens Fund in 1968; the Fund still protects and preserves natural habitats and wildlife in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Hill pushed the state legislature to approve a bill for purchase of the land. The bill passed unanimously. Thus was established California Redwood Park—today known as Big Basin Redwoods State Park. Had the forest not been saved at that time, it was estimated that in only six months, no virgin trees would remain.

Hill photographed much of the early history of Big Basin:

Father of the Forest redwood, ca. 1915

Sempervirens Club annual meeting ca. 1915

Campfire benches and tents, ca. 1915

NEARBY STATE PARKS

Año Nuevo State Park
20 miles N of Santa Cruz on
Hwy 1, Pescadero 94060 (650) 879-2025

Butano State Park
1500 Cloverdale Road,
Pescadero 94060 (650) 879-2040

Castle Rock State Park
15000 Skyline Blvd.,
Los Gatos 95030 (408) 867-2952

This park receives support in part through two nonprofit organizations:

Mountain Parks Foundation (inland areas)
525 N. Big Trees Park Rd., Felton, CA 95018
(831) 335-3174 • **www.mountainparks.org**

Waddell Creek Association (Rancho del Oso)
3600 Highway 1, Davenport CA 95017
(831) 427-2288 • **www.ranchodeloso.org**

Big Basin Redwoods
State Park
Legend
Major Road
Paved Road
Unpaved Fire/Service Road (Open to Hike/Bike/Horse)
Trail (Hiking Only)
Accessible Trail
Multi-use Trail (Open to Hike/Bike/Horse)
Wilderness Area
Concession-operated Group Campground (By Reservation Only)
Accessible Feature
Bridge
Campfire Center
Campground
Group Campground
Horse Campground
Horse Staging Area
Horses Allowed
Locked Gate
Marsh
No Horses Allowed
No Public Access
Parking
Picnic Area
Primitive Campground
Ranger Station/Office
Restrooms
Telephone
Viewpoint
Waterfall
BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK
BUTANO STATE PARK
CASTLE ROCK STATE PARK
AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK
WEST WADDELL CREEK STATE WILDERNESS
BBRSP
THEODORE J. HOOVER NATURAL PRESERVE
PACIFIC OCEAN
YIELD TO
Sandy Point
Sunset
Sky Meadow
Huckleberry
Wastahi
Sequoia
Jay
Sempervirens
Blooms Creek
Little Basin Concession Group Campground (reservations only)
Seasonal Bridge
Park Entrance
Museum/ Visitor Center
Twin Redwoods
Alder
Rancho del Oso
Rancho del Oso Nature and History Center
Waterman Gap
Slippery Rock
Picnic Loop
Nature Lodge & Store
Old Lodge
Park Headquarters Visitor Center
Tent Cabins
Maddock Family Cabin Site
Bob Kirsch Connector Trail
Gazos Creek Rd (closed seasonally)
to Hwy 1
to Cutter Scout Reservation
to Portola Redwoods SP and Pescadero Creek County Park
to Saratoga/ Skyline Blvd
to Santa Cruz
to Boulder Creek, Hwy 9
see detail map
Big Basin Redwoods SP
San Mateo
Fremont
San José
Los Gatos
Half Moon Bay
Santa Cruz
to San Francisco
to Oakland
to Los Angeles
to Monterey
Butano SP
Año Nuevo SP
Wilder Ranch SP
Castle Rock SP
Portola Redwoods SP
Pescadero Creek County Park
Pancho San Antonio County Park
0 5 10 Miles
0 5 10 15 Kilometers
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 Miles
0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.25 Kilometers
0 0.25 0.5 Mi
0 0.5 1 Km
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