# Henry Cowell Redwoods

## State Park

## Our Mission

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**Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park**
**Day Use: 101 North Big Trees Park Road**
**Felton, CA 95018 (831) 335-4598**
**Campground: 2591 Graham Hill Road**
**Scotts Valley, CA 95060 (831) 438-2396**

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*This lush redwood forest, with sun glimmering through trees along the San Lorenzo River, offers visitors a peaceful retreat.*

**Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park inspires calm reflection** among ancient giant redwoods and sunny sandhill ridges. The park's historical significance and its spectacular scenery draw travelers from all around the world.

Visitors can enjoy hiking, horseback riding, picnicking, swimming, camping and fishing on more than 4,650 acres of forested and open land in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The park's groves of old- and second-growth redwoods flank the San Lorenzo River. In the serene Fall Creek Unit, a few miles north of the main park, hikers experience a verdant, fern-lined river canyon and encounter the remnants of a successful lime-processing industry.

## PARK HISTORY

### Native People

The Sayante tribe, a subgroup of the Ohlone culture, lived in this area before Spanish rule. They found plentiful shelter, water and food both on the land and in the river. The San Lorenzo River was a major source of fish for the Sayante people, allowing them to exchange steelhead and salmon with neighboring tribes for acorns, obsidian and other resources.

### Early Entrepreneurs

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park is located on a former land grant. First owner Pedro Sainsevain acquired this land around 1846 and went into the lumber business. He built a lumber mill near the park's present-day picnic area. Known as "Rancho Rincon," the land included a large, old-growth redwood forest. Over the years, this tract changed ownership many times. Much of the surrounding land was logged, but the giant trees in the grove were never cut.

In 1867 Joseph Warren Welch bought 350 acres, including the 40-acre virgin redwood stand now known as the park's Redwood Grove. Welch built an elaborate vacation resort in 1868, naming it the "Big Trees Grove." The ancient trees attracted dignitaries from around the world, including

*General Frémont tree: (left to right) General John C. Frémont, his wife Jessie Benton Frémont and their daughter Elizabeth*

Lieutenant John C. Frémont was reputed to have camped in this tree's fire-hollowed base during an 1846 expedition to survey the shortest route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. When the tree was dedicated to him in 1888, then-General Frémont was reported to have said, "It makes a great story; let it stand."

Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Benjamin Harrison.

**Fall Creek and Henry Cowell**

Fall Creek Unit, the northern section of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, is located about ¼ mile west of the town of Felton. The 2,390-acre area contains nearly the entire Fall Creek watershed, extending southeast from Ben Lomond Mountain.

The Ben Lomond Fault runs along the base of the mountain, exposing huge amounts of limestone. This limestone was formed by heat and pressure crystallizing layers of tiny sea creature fossil remains.

Heating raw limestone in kilns for several days yielded lime used in mortar and plaster—staples of the building industry.

Massachusetts native Henry Cowell bought an interest in the thriving Davis and Jordan Lime Company in 1865. Cowell renamed his venture the IXL Lime Company in 1888. At its highest demand, 80% of lime came from Santa Cruz County.

Kilns were built on the North Fork of Fall Creek to convert the quarried rock into usable material. Hundreds of thousands of cords of wood were burned over the years to keep the kiln fires burning—leaving the hills bare. Eventually, raw limestone and log supplies dwindled as concerns about deforestation arose and lime processing became obsolete. The Fall Creek kilns closed in 1919 after nearly 70 years of full-scale operation.

Today, the old IXL lime kilns can be seen along the South Fork Trail; the second-growth redwoods nearby testify to nature's resilience as the hillsides become forested once again.

**Creating the Park**

In 1899, a fateful afternoon in a resort called Welch's Grove started a movement that forever changed the way people regarded redwoods. Andrew P. Hill, a photographer and writer, was taking photographs of the coast redwoods in the grove. As he was doing so, the owner of the resort saw him and demanded the glass-plate negatives. Hill refused and left angry. Believing that these huge old trees should be protected for all to see, Hill founded the Sempervirens Club.

The Big Trees Grove resort operated until 1930 when Santa Cruz County took over control, calling this land "Santa Cruz Big Trees County Park." The hard work of advocate W.T. Jeter, president of Santa Cruz County Bank, was influential in creating the county park.

In the early 1950s, Samuel "Harry" Cowell proposed combining his adjacent family-owned property with the county park property to create a single park. Named after his father, Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park was dedicated in 1954. The Fall Creek Unit was later deeded to the State in 1972 by the Cowell family's foundation.

## NATURAL HISTORY

**Geology**

Located in the rugged Santa Cruz Mountains, Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park provides a fascinating geologic view into the landscape. The San Lorenzo River flows through the park, roughly following the path of the Ben Lomond Fault. Stream erosion and fault movement are the primary forces that have helped shape this land.

The northern part of the park is composed of soft sandstone and mudstone, with fossil evidence that it was once a shallow inland sea, including sand dollars and shark teeth.

The southern portion of the park consists of harder granite and schist formed from magma. These geologic factors determine the vast diversity of flora and fauna that inhabit the park. Three of the park's four main ecosystems—redwood, riparian (streamside), and sandhill chaparral—were shaped as a result of these processes. The human-made grassland is the park's fourth main ecosystem.

**Wildlife**

The park's four distinct ecosystems allow for many wildlife viewing opportunities. Watch for white-tailed kites and white-crowned sparrows flying above the grasslands looking for their next meal.

Along the San Lorenzo River, listen for the belted kingfisher and catch a glimpse of the great blue heron. This year-round river is home to endangered steelhead trout, providing a nourishing place for the fish to spawn.

In the forest, the melody of the Pacific wren and the clicking sounds of the dark-eyed junco echo through the forest. Keep your eyes peeled for banana slugs moving along the path and Western gray squirrels leaping from limb to limb.

The wrentit's lilting song and the scrub jay's screeching calls fill the air in the sandhill chaparral ecosystem. Two rare endemic insect species, the endangered Zayante band-winged grasshopper and the Mt. Hermon June beetle, inhabit this area of the park. Coyotes, bobcats, and black-tail deer roam freely throughout the park searching for food, water and shelter.

**Plant Communities**

Among the world's tallest old-growth coast redwoods, the largest trees surrounding the Redwood Grove Loop Trail may be up to 280 feet (85m) tall and 1,500 years old. Plentiful rain and coastal fog supply moisture to sustain their growth.

California bay trees, tanoaks and hazelnut shrubs adapt to the shade beneath the redwoods. Clover-like redwood sorrel carpets the forest floor, along with wild ginger, trillium and milk maids.

The nearby San Lorenzo River supports a remarkable riparian ecosystem. Large western sycamore, black cottonwood, white alder and California box-elder trees offer cooling shade for river inhabitants. The arroyo willow stabilizes the river's banks.

On the ridgetops of the sandhill ecosystem, drought-tolerant plants with long taproots flourish in the sandy soil. Here, in one of the world's five marine ponderosa pine communities, ponderosa and knobcone pines grow along the ridge tops and surround the park's observation deck.

Manzanita, bush poppy, chamise, sticky monkeyflower and ceanothus all bloom in spring. The Ben Lomond spineflower and Ben Lomond buckwheat, found only in this area, add to the distinctive Santa Cruz sandhills ecosystem.

Native plants such as California poppy, coyote brush and lupine endure among non-native grasses, thistle and sweet pea in the grassland. The riparian forest that once covered this area is now reclaiming its former territory.

## RECREATION

Weather changes quickly in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Temperatures range from the upper 30s to mid-50s in winter and from the high 40s to the 80s in summer.

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park offers camping and a large day-use area. Limited catch-and-release steelhead fishing attracts anglers to the San Lorenzo River. Visit **www.dfg.ca.gov** for licensing regulations, updates and fishing restrictions.

Equestrians may use the main park trails as posted. Bicycles are not allowed in Fall Creek Unit. Observe all trail postings.

The privately owned Roaring Camp and Big Trees Railroad adjoins the property outside the main park. The train takes passengers on a rail tour through the forested area of the park.

**Camping**
Sites are open seasonally. For details and site-specific advance reservations, call (800) 444-7275 or visit the website at **www.parks.ca.gov**.

**Trails:**
**Redwood Grove Loop Trail—**Walk the self-guided loop to view the tree named for "Pathfinder" Lt. John C. Frémont.
**Ridge Fire Road near Pine Trail—**The observation deck at one of the park's highest points offers vistas of the Monterey Bay.

**Fall Creek Unit**
Open for day use only, Fall Creek includes almost twenty miles of connecting trails. Parking and trailheads are marked on Felton Empire Road off Highway 9.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The Redwood Grove Loop Trail is accessible for about three-quarters of a mile. The campground has accessible sites with restrooms and showers. The Visitor Center and Mountain Parks Store are both accessible; curbside pickup and drop-off is recommended for people with mobility issues. For accessibility updates, visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Big Basin Redwoods State Park
  21600 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek 95006
  (831) 338-8860
- Wilder Ranch State Park
  1401 Coast Road, Santa Cruz 95060
  (831) 423-9703

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law; do not disturb them.
- Camping and fires are permitted only in designated areas.
- Dogs on a six-foot-maximum leash are allowed only in picnic areas and campsites and on Meadow Trail, Pipeline Road and Graham Hill Trail.
- All pets must be attended at all times and confined in a tent or vehicle at night.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not permitted to use other trails, fire roads or the Fall Creek Unit.
- Camping, bicycles, smoking and fires are prohibited in the Fall Creek Unit.
- Stay on established trails and out of all undeveloped areas and wildcat trails.
- Be alert for rattlesnakes and mountain lions. Check for ticks after hiking.
- Poison oak can be identified by its leaves—they grow in groups of three with gently lobed edges. The plant may appear as a bush, vine, or ground cover with green or reddish leaves. Many people are allergic to its oil.

***"Leaves of three—let it be."***

This park is supported in part through the
Mountain Parks Foundation
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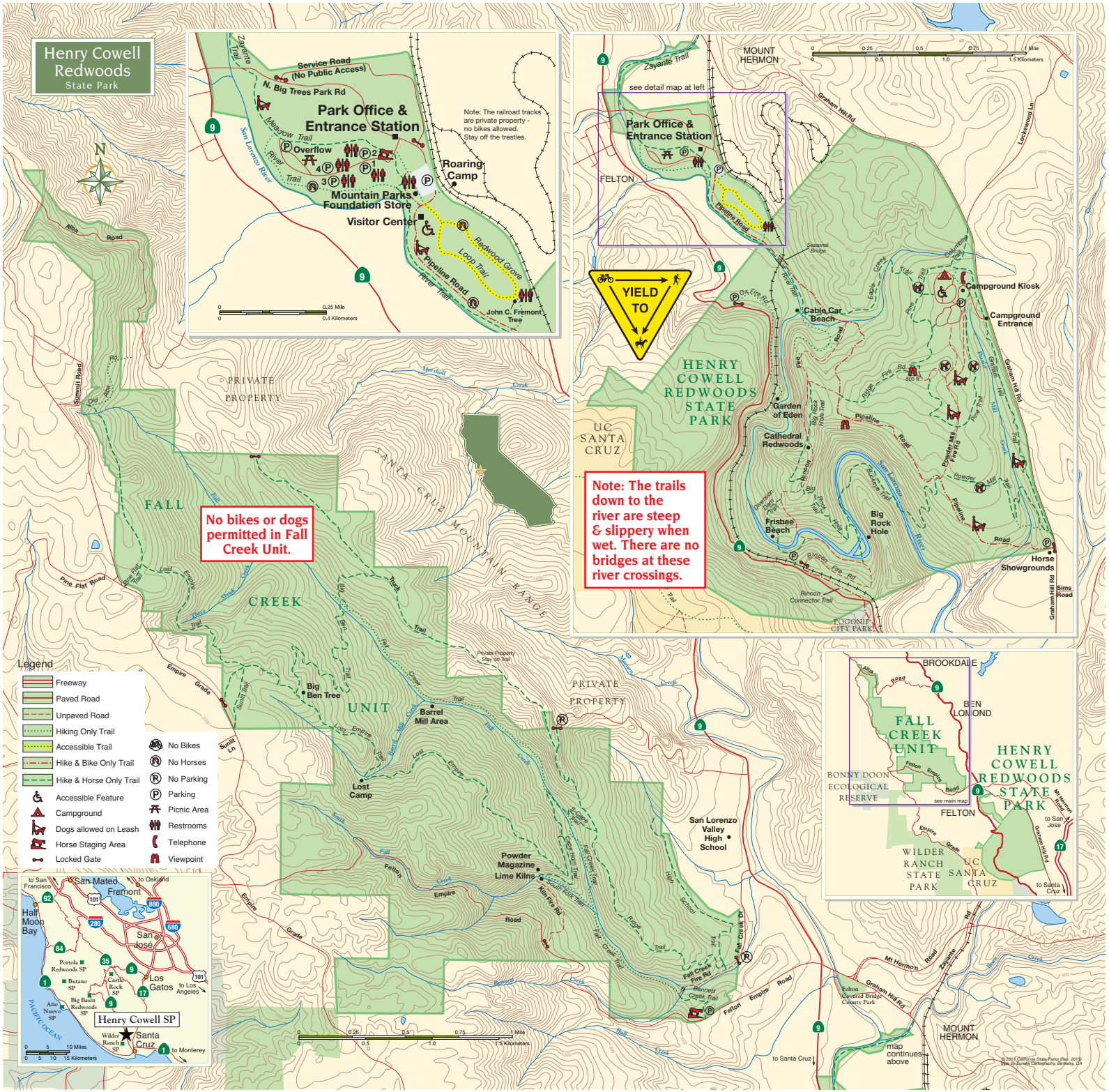
**www.mountainparks.org**

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