# Natural Bridges

## State Beach

## 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 **(831) 423-4609**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.


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**Natural Bridges State Beach**
**2531 West Cliff Drive**
**Santa Cruz, CA 95060**
**(831) 423-4609**


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*Three arches carved by nature out of a sandstone cliff inspired the naming of Natural Bridges. Reclaimed by the sea, the inner and outer arches have fallen, leaving only the central bridge.*

*Drawing of Natural Bridges, ca. 1870s*

**Natural Bridges State Beach is a magnificent oasis of natural beauty** located between the edge of the ocean and the outer limits of the city of Santa Cruz. This popular 65-acre park is known for its wave-carved sea arch, family-friendly beach, tide pools, and visiting monarch butterflies.

*Great blue heron at Moore Creek*

## THE "BRIDGES"

Natural Bridges State Beach is named for three naturally occurring arches that were once part of a large cliff that jutted out into the sea. The bridges formed as wave power eroded the mudstone, deepening depressions in the cliff that grew until the rock formed a cave, and eventually, a bridge.

Of the three original arches, only the middle one remains. The outermost arch fell during the early 20th century, and the inner arch collapsed during a 1980 storm.

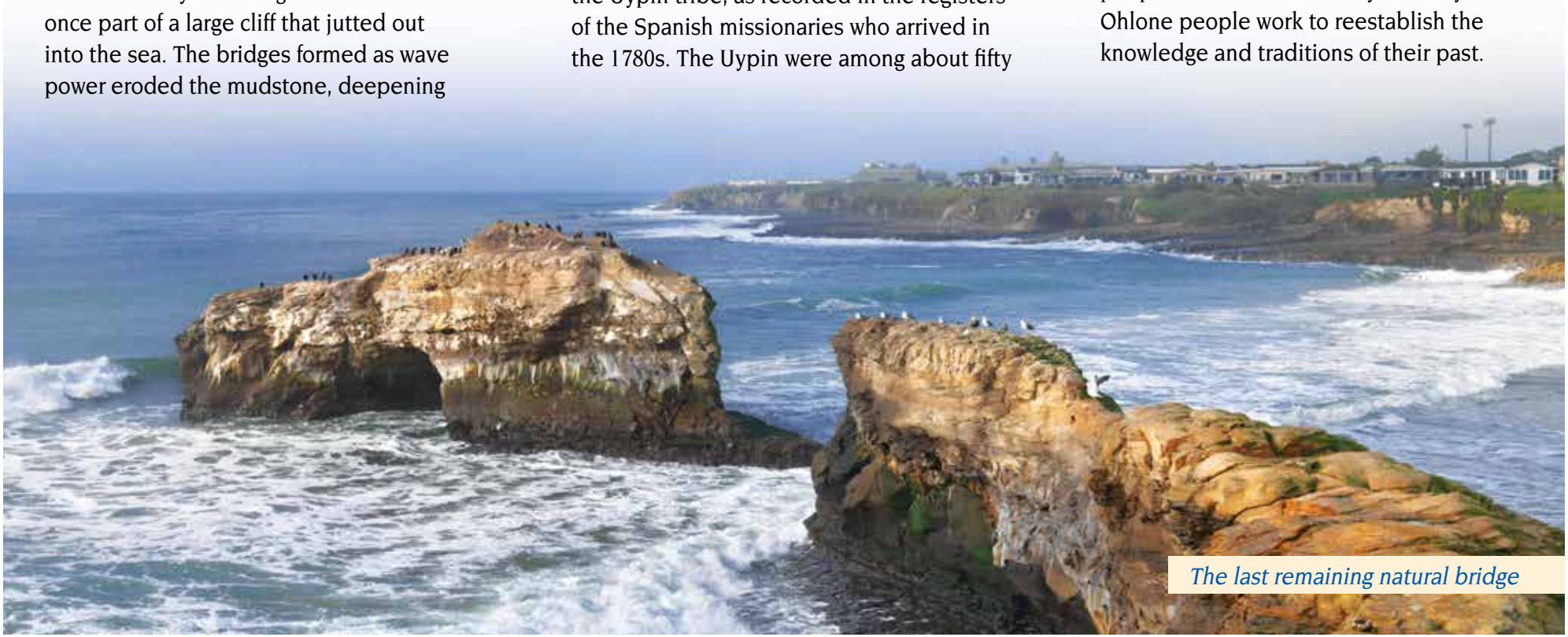
## PARK HISTORY

### Native Americans

The first people to inhabit this area were the Uypin tribe, as recorded in the registers of the Spanish missionaries who arrived in the 1780s. The Uypin were among about fifty inter-related tribes spread throughout the Monterey and San Francisco Bay areas. Their descendants are collectively called the Ohlone today.

In the past, the Uypin people hunted marine mammals and inland game, fished, and harvested shellfish and a variety of seeds, berries, herbs, and bulbs. They also depended on storable plant foods like acorns, hazel, laurel, and buckeye nuts. The Uypin people practiced land-management techniques that enhanced nature's productivity.

They were also skilled in various crafts like making baskets, fiber cordage, stone tools, and shell ornaments for trade to people in the interior. Many of today's Ohlone people work to reestablish the knowledge and traditions of their past.



*The last remaining natural bridge*

**Euro-American Settlers**

Spanish colonists eventually took over the Ohlone people's traditional lands. When the Ohlone were brought into the mission system, their population was nearly decimated by European diseases to which they had no resistance.

By 1834 this area was governed by newly independent Mexican authorities, who used coastal land for cattle grazing. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, Alta California was ceded to the United States; California became a state in 1850.

Over the years, this land supported a dairy farm, a hotel, a brussels sprouts farm, housing for workers at the Antonelli Mill Pond, a South Seas movie set, and an unfinished housing development.

The State of California purchased the land in 1933. Until the 1970s, open space surrounded the park, now enclosed by development. Both local residents and visitors can find respite on the beach or hiking among a dozen natural habitats.

## HABITATS AND WILDLIFE

Egrets, herons, and other residential and migratory birds traveling along the Pacific Flyway rely on Natural Bridges for safe shelter or an inviting meal.

The Moore Creek Wetlands Natural Preserve provides an important habitat for a variety of birds, invertebrates, fish, and amphibians. The preserve has both saltwater and freshwater marshes.

*Left: Guided walk on the Monarch Trail. Above: Carefully examining life in the tide pools. Right: Giant green sea anemone.*

## TIDE POOLS—LIFE ON THE EDGE

Twice each day, the tide uncovers the park's rocky shore, where sea stars, hermit crabs, urchins, kelp, and many more species live among the pools and crevices. This area is also a state marine reserve; its sea life receives extra protection as residents of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Animals and plants living in tide pools survive by adapting to rapid changes in temperature, water salinity, pounding surf, and human activity. They also adapt to specific areas of the rocky intertidal zone. Please leave all plants and animals attached to the rocks. Prying or pulling them off may harm or kill them.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Day use**—Natural Bridges State Beach is a haven for the outdoor enthusiast.

- **View wildlife:** The beach is an excellent vantage point for viewing the remaining natural bridge, as well as shore birds, migrating whales, seals, and sea otters.
- **Relax:** The sheltered pocket beach between two headlands is also ideal for relaxing and playing in the sand, enjoying the sun, and watching the waves.
- **Fly or surf:** Frequent afternoon winds take flying kites to soaring heights and windsurfers for an exhilarating sail on the bay. Large winter swells are popular with experienced surfers and boogie boarders.

*Snowy egret*

- **Run or bike** on the park's main road.
- **Hike:** Trails offer hikers a chance to stroll through the Monarch Butterfly Natural Preserve and the Moore Creek Wetlands Natural Preserve.
- **Picnics and sunsets:** The picnic area has numerous tables and barbecue stoves. Sunsets over the bay make a spectacular ending to a fun-filled day.

## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Guided Walks

Natural Bridges docents offer guided tide pool walks, butterfly walks, and habitat hikes.

### Monarch Butterfly Tours

At 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on weekends during fall and winter, meet at the visitor center to discover more about the monarch's miraculous life cycle.

### Exploring Tide Pools

Docents lead tide pool explorations year round during low tides.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Welcome Back Monarchs Day

From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the second Sunday in October, welcome the monarch butterflies back to Natural Bridges. Music, food, games, guided walks, and activities explore the wonder and science of monarch butterflies.

### The Migration Festival

From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the second Saturday in February, learn about the journeys of the many animals that migrate to and through Natural Bridges and the surrounding area. Educational booths, guided walks, entertainment, games, and more make for a day of fun and discovery.

In addition to these activities, organized groups of ten or more may schedule guided walks on weekends by calling the park. School group walks are offered on weekdays by appointment.

### Docent Training Classes

Volunteer docents lead guided walks, host the visitor center, help with park restoration, and assist with special events. Contact the visitor center to apply for the next docent training class.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Wilder Ranch State Park
  1788 Coast Rd., Santa Cruz 95060
  (831) 423-9703
- Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park
  101 North Big Trees Park Rd., Felton 95018
  (831) 335-4598
- New Brighton State Beach
  1500-1598 Park Ave., Capitola 95010
  (831) 464-6329
- Seacliff State Beach
  721-729 State Park Dr., Aptos 95003
  (831) 685-6442
- Lighthouse Field State Beach
  West Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz 95060
  (831) 429-2850

## DIRECTIONS:

Hwy. 1 North turns into Mission Street when traveling through the westside Santa Cruz business district. Turn left onto Swift Street and follow it to the ocean. Turn right on West Cliff Drive, which ends at the park.

*Cormorants and brown pelicans*

*Accessible boardwalk in monarch grove*

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Parking, the picnic area, and the boardwalk into the monarch grove are accessible.
- The accessible visitor center has exhibits, interactive and interpretive displays, and videos (some with large-print formats and scripts).
- Restrooms are accessible.
- An accessible beach viewing platform adjoins the overflow parking lot and entrance kiosk.
- A beach wheelchair may be checked out at the visitor center.

Accessibility is continually improving. For the latest updates, visit the website at **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact:
Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks
144 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 429-1840 • **www.thatsmypark.org**

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Natural Bridges State Beach is open year round from 8 a.m. to sunset.
- Surf Safety—Enter tide pools only during periods of low tide. Often there is no lifeguard on duty, and the surf can be unpredictable. Hazardous rip currents and large waves can appear out of nowhere and sweep people out to sea.

  The beach and tide pools can be extremely dangerous. Do not run on the wet rocks of the intertidal area, and never turn your back to the waves. Check with the lifeguard or at the entrance station or visitor center before entering the ocean and the tide pool areas.
- No Collecting—Do not disturb tide pool residents or the butterfly clusters in any way. The park's plants, animals, and all natural and cultural features are protected by law.
- Except for service animals, dogs are allowed only in the parking lots and picnic areas, but not on the beach and trails. All dogs must be on a six-foot-maximum leash and under human control at all times. Please do not leave your dog in a vehicle.
- Stay on designated trails to protect plants, to prevent erosion, and to avoid poison oak and stinging nettles.
- Bicycles are permitted only on paved roads.
- Fires and glass containers are not allowed on the beach.
- Alcoholic beverages are only allowed in the park with a previously issued special-event permit. Submit permit applications at least 30 days before the event date.
- Do not smoke, ride bikes, roller skate, skateboard, or speak loudly in the monarch butterfly grove.

*Moore Creek Wetlands Natural Preserve*

## MONARCH BUTTERFLY NATURAL PRESERVE

*Clustering monarchs*

Natural Bridges is home to one of the largest monarch butterfly over-wintering sites in California. Each fall, the migratory butterflies arrive on the coast from across the western United States to seek sanctuary from the winter's cold. They roost in the monarch preserve from October to mid-February, with the greatest numbers from November to mid-December.

The monarchs cluster in rings of trees, intertwining their legs to avoid being dislodged from their companions by the wind and rain. With their tan undersides, the clusters resemble clumps of dead leaves. When the air temperature rises above 55 degrees, the butterflies burst from their clusters, floating through the trees and into the surrounding area in search of flower nectar and dew.

In January and February, the monarchs begin a daring 1,500 mile migration—a journey that spans five generations—as they spread out across the western United States. Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed plants inland—from the Bay Area to the eastern Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountain foothills. Each generation hatches and travels further inland, where another generation fans out even further. The final generation returns to California, where their great-great grandparents originated. Monarch lifespans vary from two weeks to nine months. Those that migrate to the coast in autumn live longer; the last generation at Natural Bridges live as long as nine months and begin the cycle once more.

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