

# Henry Cowell Redwoods

State Park



## Our Mission

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[SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp](http://SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp)

### 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 sunlight  
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 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 several former Mexican land grants known as Rancho Rincon, Rancho Zayante and Rancho Carbonera. Ownership of the land changed hands many times as pioneers arrived—introducing logging, tanoak-bark harvesting, lime manufacturing, and even gold mining in the area.

In 1867, Joseph Warren Welch Sr. purchased 350 acres here. Although much of the surrounding land had been logged, the large tract of old-growth redwoods we enjoy today still stood. He advertised the grove of uncut giants, and the Welch Big Trees Grove became a famous tourist destination. After his death in 1876, Welch's widow, Anna Isabella, leased the land to entrepreneur J.M. Hooper, who ran the resort that included a small hotel and dance floor near the Frémont Tree. Famous people such as Andrew Carnegie and Presidents Benjamin Harrison and Theodore Roosevelt visited.



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

Explorer John C. Frémont reputedly camped in this tree's fire-hollowed base when he and legendary scout Kit Carson visited Isaac Graham in 1846. When he returned to the grove in 1888, then-General Frémont was reported to have said, "It's a good story; let it stand."







(now called Big Basin Redwoods State Park), where the Sempervirens Club was founded.

The Big Trees Grove resort operated here for another 30 years. William T. Jeter, with the help of his wife Jennie Bliss Jeter and friend Joseph Welch Jr., worked tirelessly to ensure the creation of Santa Cruz County Big Trees Park in 1930. Citizens dedicated the Jeter Tree in his memory; the County managed

the park for more than 20 years. It became part of a new state park in 1954, when Samuel (Harry) Cowell donated 1,600 adjoining acres on the condition that the combined park be named for his father Henry. The Cowell Family Foundation deeded the Fall Creek Unit to the State in 1972.

#### **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 pressure that crystallized 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.

At the time of peak 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 redwood were burned over the years to keep the kiln fires blazing—barring the hills.

Eventually, raw limestone and log supplies dwindled as concerns about deforestation arose; lime processing here ceased. The Fall Creek kilns closed in 1919.

Today, the old 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.

### **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.

#### **Creating the Park**

On a fateful afternoon in 1900, Andrew P. Hill photographed “The Giant” redwood tree in the Welch Big Trees Grove. When the proprietor objected to the unauthorized pictures, demanding the negatives, Hill angrily refused. Hill resolved that there should be a public park where the trees belonged to everyone. He reported the incident to journalist Josephine Clifford McCrackin, who followed up with a letter to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* urging Californians to “Save the redwoods.”

The movement led to the creation of nearby California Redwood Park in 1902

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. Climate change is diminishing the plentiful rain and moist fog that sustained the redwoods' 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. Winter temperatures range from the upper 30s to mid-50s 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.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov) for updates, licensing regulations, 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. For a fee, 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](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

### Henry Cowell 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. 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 must be on a leash no longer than six feet and are allowed only in picnic areas and campsites and on the Meadow Trail, Pipeline Road, Graham Hill Trail, and Powder Mill Fire Road.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not permitted to use other trails, fire roads, or the Fall Creek Unit.
- All pets must be attended at all times and confined in a tent or vehicle at night.
- Camping, bicycles, smoking, and fires are prohibited in the Fall Creek Unit.
- Stay on established trails and out of all undeveloped areas and unlabeled 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  
525 N. Big Trees Park Road  
Felton, CA 95018 • (831) 335-3174  
[www.mountainparks.org](http://www.mountainparks.org)





**Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park**

**Park Office & Entrance Station**

**Visitor Center**

**Foundation Store**

**Roaring Camp**

**John C. Fremont Tree**

**Redwood Grove**

**Loop Trail**

**Pipeline Road**

**Meadow Trail**

**San Lorenzo River**

**Service Road (No Public Access)**

**N. Big Trees Park Rd**

**Overflow**

**Trail**

**Yosemite Trail**

**San Lorenzo River**

**0 0.25 Mile 0.4 Kilometers**

**Note: Railroad tracks are private property. Keep off tracks and trestles.**

**YIELD TO**

**HENRY COWELL REDWOODS STATE PARK**

**UC SANTA CRUZ**

**Note: The trails down to the river are steep & slippery when wet. There are no bridges at these river crossings.**

**Legend**

- Freeway
- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Hiking Only Trail
- Accessible Trail
- Hike & Bike Only Trail
- Hike & Horse Only Trail
- Accessible Feature
- Campground
- Dogs allowed on Leash
- Horse Staging Area
- Locked Gate
- No Bikes
- No Dogs
- No Horses
- No Parking
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Seasonal Bridge
- Telephone
- Viewpoint

**Henry Cowell SP**

**San Francisco**

**San Mateo**

**Fremont**

**San Jose**

**Los Gatos**

**San Antonio**

**San Luis Obispo**

**San Diego**

**San Bernardino**

**San Francisco Bay**

**Half Moon Bay**

**0 5 10 Miles 0 5 10 Kilometers**

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**FALL CREEK UNIT**

**PRIVATE PROPERTY**

**San Lorenzo Valley High School**

**Powder Magazine**

**Lime Kilns**

**Barrel Mill Area**

**Lost Camp**

**Big Ben Tree**

**San Lorenzo River**

**0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1.0 1.5 Kilometers**

**Henry Cowell map continues above**

**FALL CREEK UNIT**

**BONNY DOON ECOLOGICAL RESERVE**

**WILDER RANCH STATE PARK**

**SANTA CRUZ**

**SAN JUAN**

**SAN JOSE**

**San Antonio**

**San Luis Obispo**

**San Bernardino**

**San Diego**

**San Francisco**

**San Mateo**

**Fremont**

**San Jose**

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