

# Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park



## 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) 335-4598**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **[interpr@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interpr@parks.ca.gov)**.

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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**[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)**



**[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 Awaswas-speaking Sayanta people lived on these lands long before Spanish arrival. Until they were forcibly dispersed, their practices of cultural burning and selective fishing on the San Lorenzo River maintained

biodiversity and enhanced productivity on these lands.

Despite waves of colonial disruption to Native lifeways, tribal groups still work, now in partnership with California State Parks, to restore traditional stewardship methods to these lands.

#### 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 new pioneers arrived, introducing logging, tanoak-bark harvesting, lime manufacturing, and even gold mining to the area.

In 1867 Joseph Warren Welch Sr. purchased 350 acres that became known as Big Trees Grove. It was the first coast redwood stand saved purely for public enjoyment and soon became a famous tourist destination. After his death in 1875, Welch's widow, Anna, leased the land to entrepreneur J.M. Hooper to protect the trees. Hooper ran the resort

Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library



*President Theodore Roosevelt posed at the Giant on May 11, 1903. He made a plea for responsible stewardship and cautioned against marring the trees' beauty and symmetry by large signs or hundreds of calling cards.*







that included a small hotel and dance floor where famous people such as Andrew Carnegie and Presidents Benjamin Harrison and Theodore Roosevelt visited through the years.

### **Creating the Park**

Joseph Welch Jr. drove the transition of Big Trees Grove from a private resort to a public park beginning in 1926. He also insisted that to protect the trees, vehicles be prohibited from parking near the redwoods.

He enlisted the help of businessman and former politician Will Jeter, who worked tirelessly to create this public park. During Jeter's terminal illness, his wife,

Jennie Bliss Jeter, continued the campaign. In 1931, at the height of the Great Depression, Santa Cruz County Big Trees Park opened to the public.

Citizens dedicated the Jeter Tree in Will Jeter's memory, and 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 of California in 1972. Since

then, Save the Redwoods League helped to add more than 800 acres to the park.

### **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 creatures' fossilized 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, including sand dollars and shark teeth, indicating that it was once a shallow inland sea.

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.

The melody of the Pacific wren and the clicking sounds of the dark-eyed junco echo through the forest. Banana slugs slide along the path, and western gray squirrels leap 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 Mount Hermon June beetle, inhabit this area of the park. Coyotes, bobcats, and black-tailed deer roam freely throughout the park searching for food, water, and shelter.

### Plant Communities

Among the world's tallest old-growth coast redwoods, some trees surrounding the Redwood Grove Loop Trail may be up to



280 feet (85m) tall and 1,500 years old.

Climate change impacts the redwoods by diminishing the plentiful rain and moist fog that have sustained the redwoods' growth.

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

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. Arroyo willows stabilize 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 ridgetops 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 allowed only on Pipeline, Rincon, Ridge, and Powder Mill fire roads. Bicycles are not allowed in the 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

Campsites at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park are open seasonally. For more information and site-specific advance reservations, please call (800) 444-7275 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).



### Henry Cowell Trails:

**Redwood Grove Loop Trail**—The park's largest and oldest redwoods can be visited along this accessible loop, which is less than a mile.

**Ridge Fire Road near Pine Trail**—The observation deck at 805 feet, one of the park's highest points, offers vistas of Monterey Bay.

### Fall Creek Unit:

Open for day use only, Fall Creek includes almost 20 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 6 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 on 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.



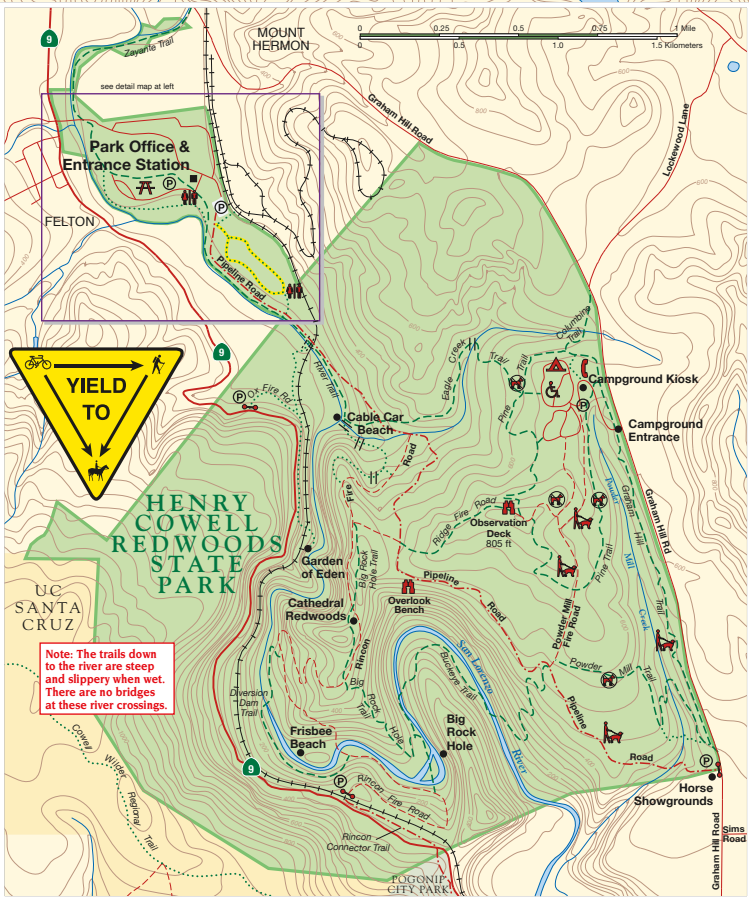
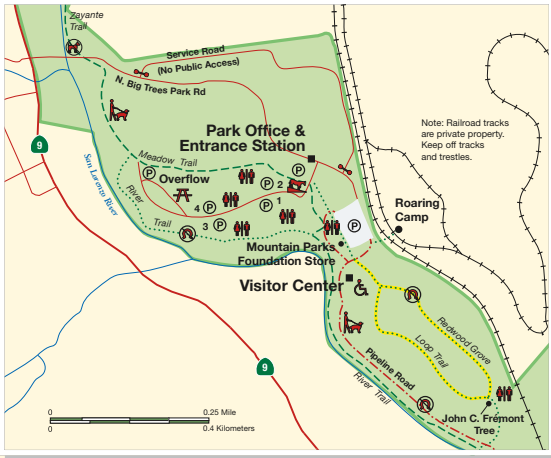
***"Leaves of three  
— let it be."***

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



- Legend**
- Major Road
  - Paved Road
  - Unpaved Road
  - Trail: Accessible
  - Trail: Hike
  - Trail: Hike & Bike
  - Trail: Hike & Horse
  - Accessible Feature
  - Bridge
  - Bridge: Seasonal
  - Campground
  - Dogs Allowed on Leash
  - Horse Staging Area
  - Locked Gate
  - No Dogs Allowed
  - No Horses Allowed
  - No Parking
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Restrooms
  - Telephone
  - Viewpoint

