Calaveras Big Trees

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 **(209) 795-2334**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
For information call: (800) 777-0369
(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.
711, TTY relay service

www.parks.ca.gov

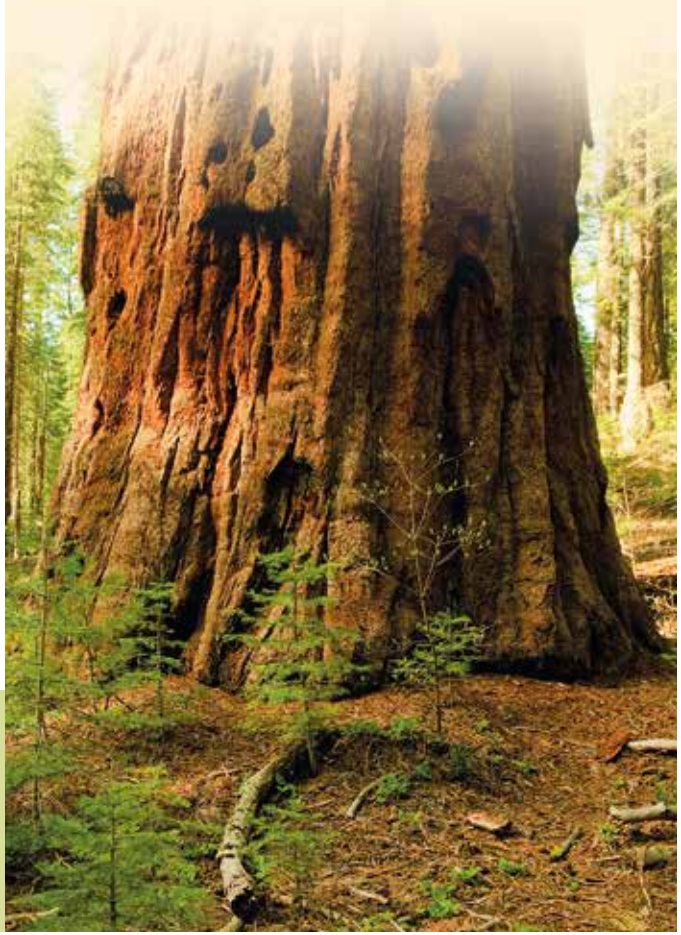
Save The Redwoods LEAGUE®

SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Calaveras Big Trees State Park
1170 East Highway 4, Arnold, CA 95223
(209) 795-2334
www.parks.ca.gov/calaverasbigtrees

© 2004 California State Parks (Rev. 2016)

It is unlikely that anyone could look upon the Sequoiadendron giganteum *and not feel a sense of awe and reverence.*



Three miles north of Arnold off Highway 4, the colossal trees of Calaveras Big Trees State Park stand in quiet testimony to prehistoric times. These massive relics, which can reach a height of 325 feet and a diameter of 33 feet, are descended from trees that were standing when dinosaurs roamed Earth and birds, mammals, and flowering plants began to appear. Some of today's trees are thought to be as old as 2,000 years.

Located at the mid-elevation level of the western Sierra Nevada, Calaveras Big Trees State Park is a prime example of a mixed conifer forest in the yellow pine belt. Giant sequoias dominate ponderosa pines, sugar pines, incense cedars, and white fir. The Pacific dogwood displays white blossoms in the spring. Wildflowers along the Lava Bluffs Trail include leopard lily, Hartweg's iris, crimson columbine, monkey-flowers, harvest brodiaea, wild hyacinth, and lupine.

NATIVE PEOPLE

Though some native groups saw the trees as sacred and untouchable, the Miwok respected them and made careful use of them. These skilled fishermen, trappers, and hunters built their seasonal villages alongside the flourishing rivers of the Sierra Nevada foothills. The acorns and other seeds the Miwok harvested in the fall were a vital part of their diet. Their way of life was rich in ceremony and social activity, including the important harvesting and grinding of the fall acorn crop. Throughout this area, large granite outcroppings and boulders with groups of mortar holes bear witness to the Miwok method of grinding seeds and acorns. Today, approximately 3,500 Miwok descendants live in the area.

PARK HISTORY

In the spring of 1852, Augustus T. Dowd was tracking a wounded grizzly bear through unfamiliar territory when he came upon a forest of enormous trees. The giant sequoia that first caught his attention was the largest in what is now the Calaveras North Grove. At first, Dowd's description of what he had seen was considered a "tall tale" until he led a group of men to the grove. Word of the giant sequoia grove's existence spread rapidly. Newspapers picked up the story, bringing curious visitors and entrepreneurs eager to make their fortunes from naive spectators.

Pioneer Cabin Tree

The Discovery Tree that had earlier stopped Dowd in his tracks was the first casualty in the rush to exploit the giant sequoias. It took five men 22 days to cut it down. Sections of bark and a portion of its trunk were shipped to San Francisco to be placed on display. Later it was sent around Cape Horn to New York City, where it was considered a "humbug" by many skeptics. The financially unsuccessful showing closed, and while the tree's artifacts were awaiting shipment to Paris, a fire destroyed the entire exhibit. The Discovery Tree's stump remains in the North Grove.

Further depredations continued in the North Grove. A magnificent tree named the "Mother of the Forest" was stripped of nearly 60 tons of its bark to a height of 116 feet. The bark was sent to the East Coast and abroad for exhibition. In 1861 the Mammoth Grove Hotel was built in the North Grove. The resort hotel operated until 1943, when it was destroyed by a fire.

THE TREES

Two redwood types are native to California—the coast redwood along the northern and central coast, and the giant sequoia in scattered locations along the Sierra Nevada western slope. Conservationist John Muir declared that these giants, survivors of the Ice Age and the ravages of time, were "rapidly vanishing before the fire and steel of man…."

In 1878, after a protracted ownership battle was settled, the Calaveras property was sold at public auction. The winning bid, from James L. Sperry, was $15,000. In 1900 Mr. Sperry sold out to lumberman Robert Whiteside, raising great public protest. Whiteside declined offers from federal legislators hoping to establish a national park at Calaveras. The struggle to acquire and protect the groves stretched over the next three decades.

During this time, the Calaveras Grove Association was formed. It was inspired by the Sierra Club and Save the Redwoods League, which were leading a movement to establish a system of California state parks. Widespread public concern for the trees was beginning to have a positive effect.

THE NORTH GROVE

In 1928 Californians voted to establish a state park system through a bond act. Private donors supporting the acquisition of the North Grove included John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Mrs. William H. Crocker. The rest of the funding came from the Calaveras Grove Association and the Save the Redwoods League. At last, in 1931, the North Grove came under the protection of the State of California. Now all that was left was to find a way to acquire the South Grove.

Giant sequoia trees on the North Grove Trail

THE SOUTH GROVE

Unfortunately, the world was in the throes of the Great Depression in 1931. Newton B. Drury, Land Acquisition Officer for the then California Division of Beaches and Parks, decided against the acquisition, citing "the condition of the state park bond fund…and the difficulty in raising private gifts."

Another 23 years elapsed before the South Grove was acquired. These years were rocked by two wars, with on-again/off-again negotiations with the Pickering Lumber Company, revival of the defunct Calaveras Grove Association, and a massive grassroots fundraising campaign to preserve the quality of this untouched forest. Finally, on April 16, 1954, the Calaveras South Grove became part of Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

RECREATION

Camping and Cabins—The North Grove Campground has more than 70 sites; the Oak Hollow Campground has more than 50. Both can accommodate tents and RVs up to 30 feet. Campsites have fire rings and picnic tables; piped water, flush toilets, and pay showers are nearby.

Four rental cabins each have two bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, and private full bath.

For camping or cabin reservations, visit **www.parks.ca.gov/calaverasbigtrees** or call (800) 444-7275.

Trails—The North Grove has a level, 1.5-mile self-guided trail. The .13-mile Three Senses Trail allows visitors to experience the feel, smell, and sounds of this magnificent forest. The five-mile South Grove Trail travels along Big Trees Creek and passes the park's

A park Junior Ranger learns about wildlife by handling a coyote skin.

two largest trees—the Agassiz Tree and the Palace Hotel Tree. The fairly strenuous four-mile River Canyon Trail runs between the North Grove and the Stanislaus River. Along the Lava Bluffs Trail, hikers can view the scenic North Fork of the river.

Picnicking—Designated picnic areas are located alongside the Stanislaus River, in the North Grove, Oak Leaf Spring, and Beaver Creek areas.

Fishing—The Stanislaus River and Beaver Creek offer good fishing, particularly for rainbow trout. A valid California fishing license is required for anglers 16 and over.

Wildlife—Opportunities for wildlife observation are abundant in the park. Bird species include pileated woodpeckers, northern flickers, Steller's jays, and dark-eyed juncos. Raccoons, foxes, porcupines, chipmunks, chickarees, and flying squirrels are among the native animals. Black bears, bobcats, and coyotes are sometimes seen.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Campsites and restrooms with showers at the North Grove Campground are accessible. Some visitors may need help with sloped terrain. One campsite and the restroom with showers at the Oak Hollow Campground and one two-bedroom cabin are accessible. There are wheelchair seating spaces and an assistive listening system at the Campfire Center. Parking and exhibits at the Visitor Center are accessible.

The Three Senses Trail has a .13-mile rope-guided route with Braille text included. A restroom with adjacent parking near the warming hut off North Grove parking lot, Big Trees, North Grove, and Beaver Creek Trails, and the River Picnic Area are all accessible.

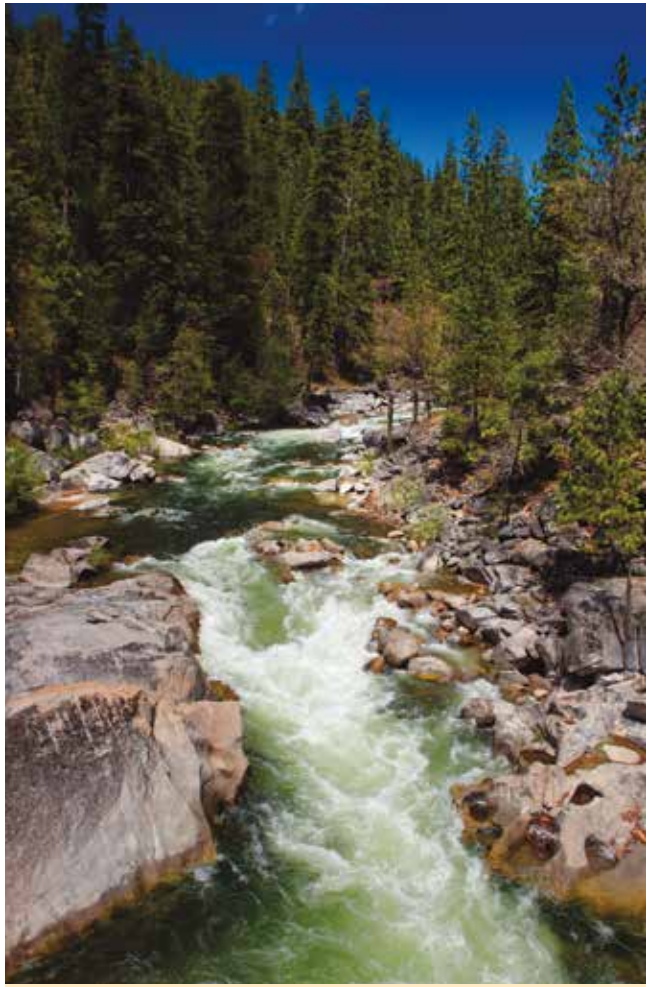
Accessibility is continually improving. For current details, visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Do not feed the bears and other wildlife; secure all food and scented items in the bear-resistant lockers day and night when not in use.
- Diving is not permitted anywhere in the park; lifeguards are not available.
- Stay on trails to protect the fragile sequoia root systems.
- All natural and cultural features in the park are protected by law and must not be disturbed nor removed.
- Dogs are allowed only in campgrounds and on unpaved roads; dogs must be on a six-foot-maximum leash. Except for service animals, dogs are not permitted on trails.

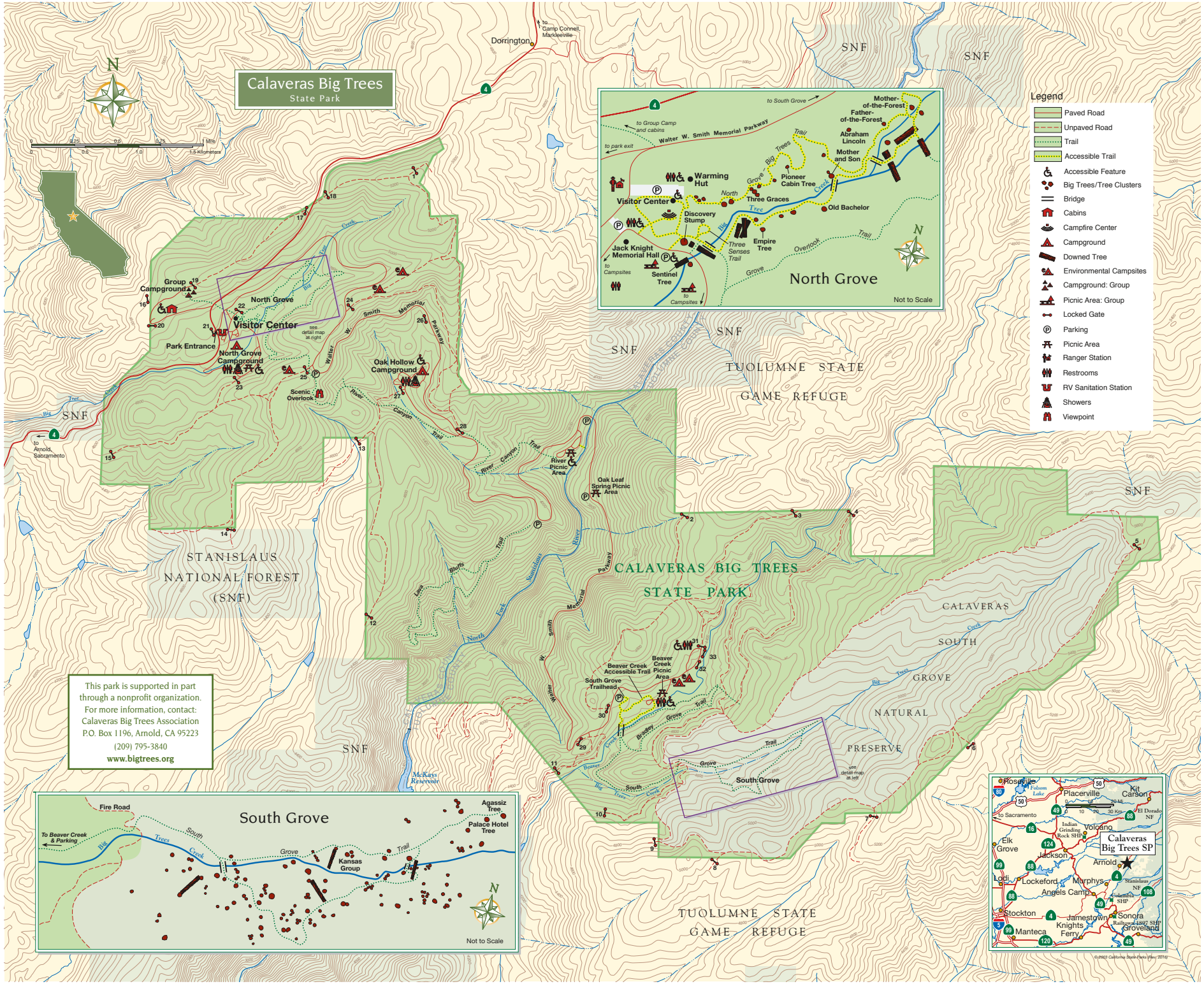
NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Columbia State Historic Park
  11255 Jackson Street, Columbia 95310
  (209) 588-9128
- Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park
  14881 Pine Grove-Volcano Road
  Pine Grove 95665 (209) 296-7488
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park
  on 5th Avenue, off Hwy. 108
  Jamestown 95327 (209) 984-3953



The Stanislaus River

Calaveras Big Trees
State Park



This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact: Calaveras Big Trees Association P.O. Box 1196, Arnold, CA 95223 (209) 795-3840 **www.bigtrees.org**

©2023 California State Parks (rev 2016)