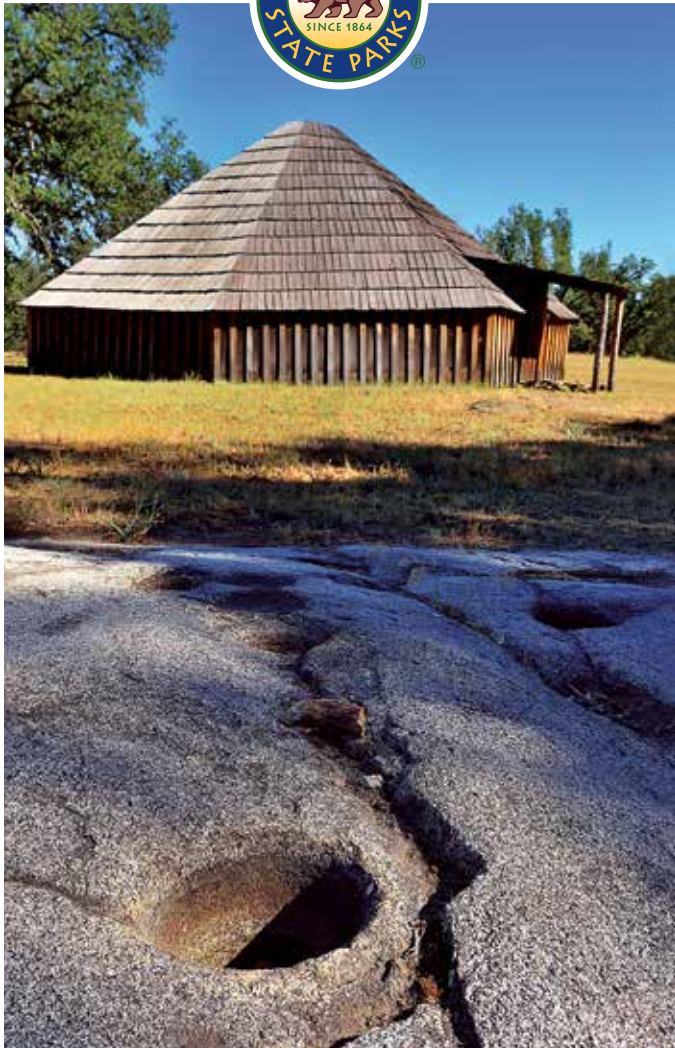


Wassama Round House State Historic Park



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) 742-7625**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Wassama Round House State Historic Park

42877 Round House Road

Ahwahnee, CA 93601

(209) 742-7625

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*The Miwok are still here:
this traditional spiritual
gathering place provides
local Miwok and Yokuts
people a connection
to their past.*



Wassama Round House State Historic Park preserves the traditional meeting place of the Southern Sierra Miwok people. Here, ancient customs of local Native California Indians are honored and passed down to younger generations.

THE FIRST PEOPLE

Native Americans have been living in this area for at least 8,000 years—passing on their traditions, beliefs, and practices for generations.

By the early 1700s, the Southern Sierra Miwok were thriving in the area of Wassama (“leaves falling” in Miwok). Life for the Miwok revolved around hunting, fishing, collecting plants, and food processing. Acorns, deer, fish, and birds were significant staples in



Chief Peter Westfall, ca. 1920

their diet. The Miwok also used fire and other sustainable harvesting techniques to manage favored plants and trees for basket-making and food resources.

In 1849, more than 100,000

Europeans and Americans poured into California during the first year of the gold rush.

The impact of gold seekers flooding into the Sierra

Nevada was dramatic and devastating for the native people whose livelihood

was tied to the land. Miners re-routed rivers, clear-cut forests, and hunted game for profit to supply the exploding populations in the state’s mining camps and port cities.

In the “Southern Mines,” miners came into direct conflict with the Southern Sierra Miwok and other native groups who lived here. As miners encroached upon, displaced,



“My family, my people, my culture, my history are here. It’s very strong and emotional.” — Suzanne Ramirez

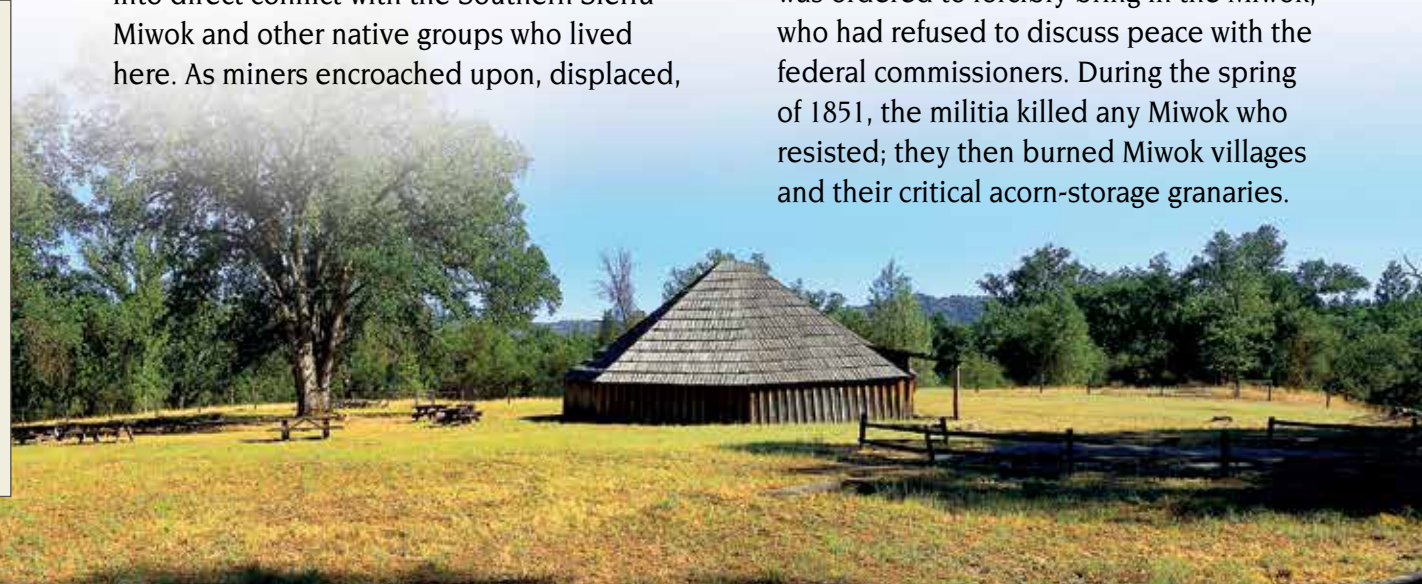
and terrorized the native people, the Miwok began to retaliate and raid the miners.

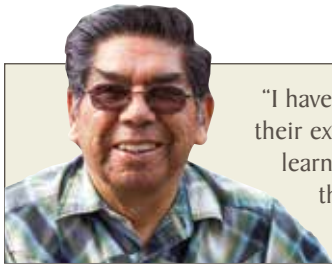
In September of 1850, James D. Savage’s trading post on the Fresno River was attacked, and three of his men were killed. In response, a state-sponsored militia known as the Mariposa Battalion was mustered. The battalion of 200 soldiers, led by Savage, was ordered to forcibly bring in the Miwok, who had refused to discuss peace with the federal commissioners. During the spring of 1851, the militia killed any Miwok who resisted; they then burned Miwok villages and their critical acorn-storage granaries.

“I was raised not far from here. My Uncle Charlie owned all this land. Any ceremony here, I was always here with my mom and dad, my mom especially, who did the cooking. They put pine needles in the round house, so we could sleep in there. [In the 1930s], we’d go to school, and I’d walk past this place every day. I grew up here. I used to climb on that rock. All my ancestors are buried here: mom, dad, brother, aunts, sisters, cousins.”



—Bernice (Jeri) Graham






“I have to go back to growing up here. It’s a gathering place for native people to interact, to share their experiences and traditions. My grandfather explained a lot of things to me, but now I’m learning more. We weren’t in a position to teach (before), but now we’re putting it into words, so that we’re able to carry that out, especially for younger people. Everything is natural here. It’s how we survived.” – *Les James*

After the loss of their traditional lands, an April 1851 treaty was proposed by the federal government to provide reservation land for the Southern Sierra Miwok. The reservation land was located on the floor of the San Joaquin Valley east of Chowchilla, Madera, and Fresno. Unfortunately, the treaty was never ratified by Congress, so the Miwok were forced off this land as well.

In April of 1858, Special Treasury Agent J. Ross Browne wrote: “In the history of the Indian Races, I have seen nothing so cruel and relentless as the treatment of these unhappy people by the authorities constituted by law for their protection. Instead of receiving aid and succor, they have been starved and driven away from the reservations and then followed into their remote hiding places, where they sought to die in peace, and cruelly slaughtered till but few are left and that few without hope.”

“To me it’s unexplainable. It’s peaceful. Our people have been here and you can just imagine what they went through (from the things my grandmother told me) and how they survived. There’s a deeper meaning, that makes you strive for more. I wish it would stay just like this, the way it was a long time ago, just simple.”

– *Karen Sargosa*



The native people endured dispossession of their land, with subsequent starvation, disease, and targeted violence. From the thousands of Indians who had populated this area before the gold rush, only 664 individual Indians remained in Mariposa and Madera counties by 1905.

THE ROUND HOUSE

The first round house or dance house (*hangji*) documented on this site was semi-subterranean, as noted by the U.S. Geological Survey in 1858. People used the half-buried house for traditional, harvest, and mourning dances and for hand games.

As was customary, the original round house was burned when the chief died. The next structure, erected in the 1880s, was burned in 1893 upon the passing of that chief.

The third round house was constructed in 1903 with the help of Jim Roane, Charlie Roane, Johnny Gibbs, and Peter Westfall. In 1912 Chief Peter Westfall applied to the federal government for the 78.6-acre allotment of land where the round house stood. In the early 1920s, the allotment was granted. When Chief Peter Westfall died in 1924, the round house was not burned at his request; it continued to be used for traditional dances until it was sold into non-Indian ownership in 1952.

Eventually, the private owners restricted Miwok access to the round house.

In the early 1970s, the Miwok in Ahwahnee, Coarsegold, and Oakhurst formed the Wassama Roundhouse Association in an effort to acquire the round house. Through their efforts and the efforts of several other activists, the State Legislature passed a bill that allowed California State Parks to acquire the land for preservation in 1978. Shortly before State Parks acquired the property, the round house inexplicably collapsed.

The current round house—reconstructed by Native American volunteers and park staff—duplicates its predecessor and was dedicated in 1985. The Wassama Round House continues to be used in traditional ways by the Southern Sierra Miwok and Chukchansi Yokuts today.





“My heart swells with pride to know that my people have danced, prayed, and sung on this land. This land and round house are alive, and I am so thankful to dance, sing, and pray here as my ancestors did.”

– Shonna Alexander

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

The park is managed by California State Parks in cooperation with the Wassama Roundhouse Association of local Southern Sierra Miwok. Gathering Days is held annually on the third Saturday in October. Participants can see cultural demonstrations and traditional Miwok dances, and contemporary Indian arts and crafts can be purchased.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

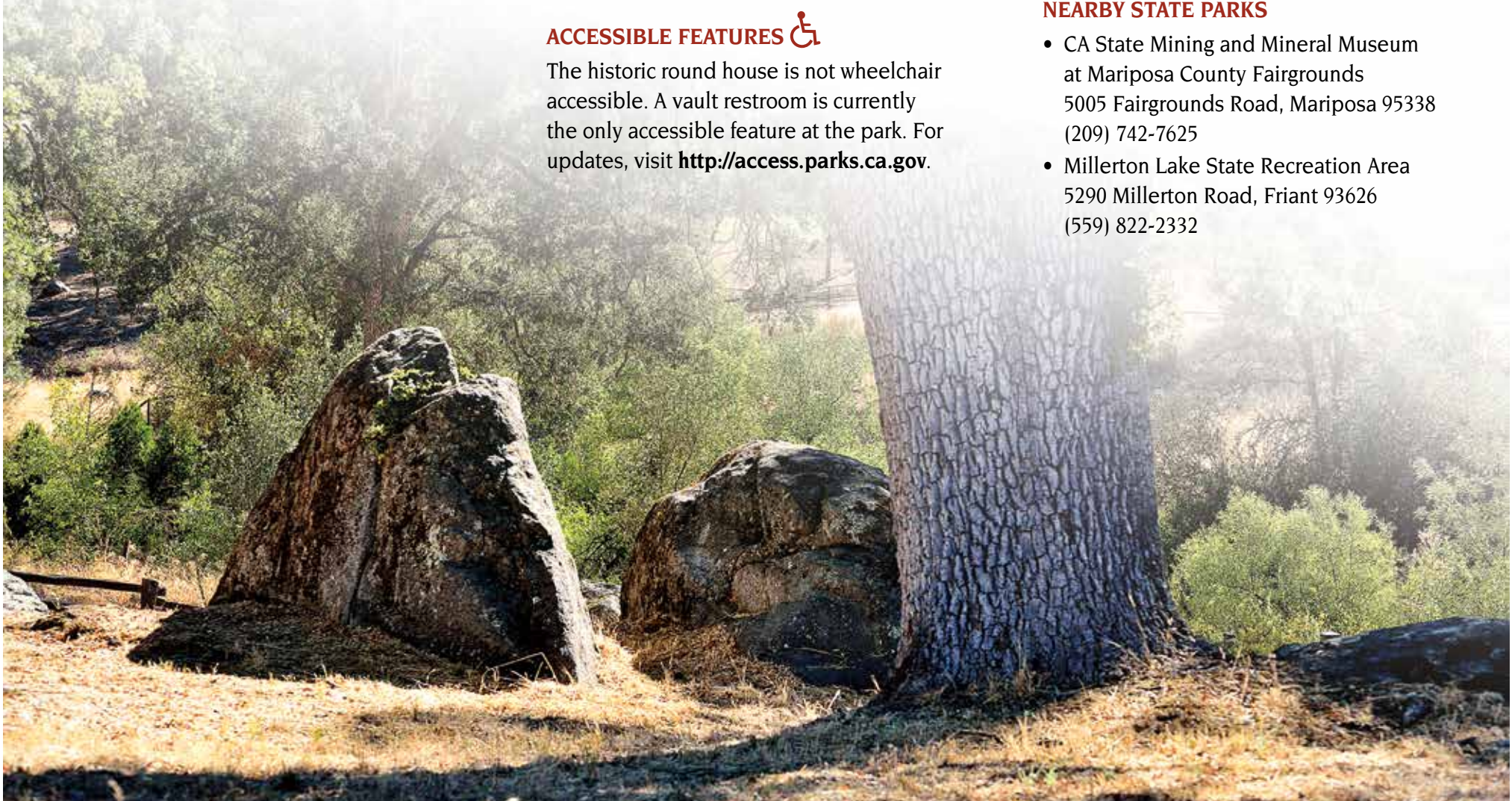
The historic round house is not wheelchair accessible. A vault restroom is currently the only accessible feature at the park. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Do not walk on the grinding rocks.
- Taking pictures inside the round house is not allowed.
- Please leash and pick up after your dog.
- Carry away all garbage.

NEARBY STATE PARKS








- CA State Mining and Mineral Museum at Mariposa County Fairgrounds
5005 Fairgrounds Road, Mariposa 95338
(209) 742-7625
- Millerton Lake State Recreation Area
5290 Millerton Road, Friant 93626
(559) 822-2332



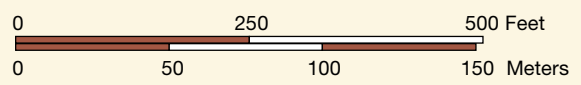
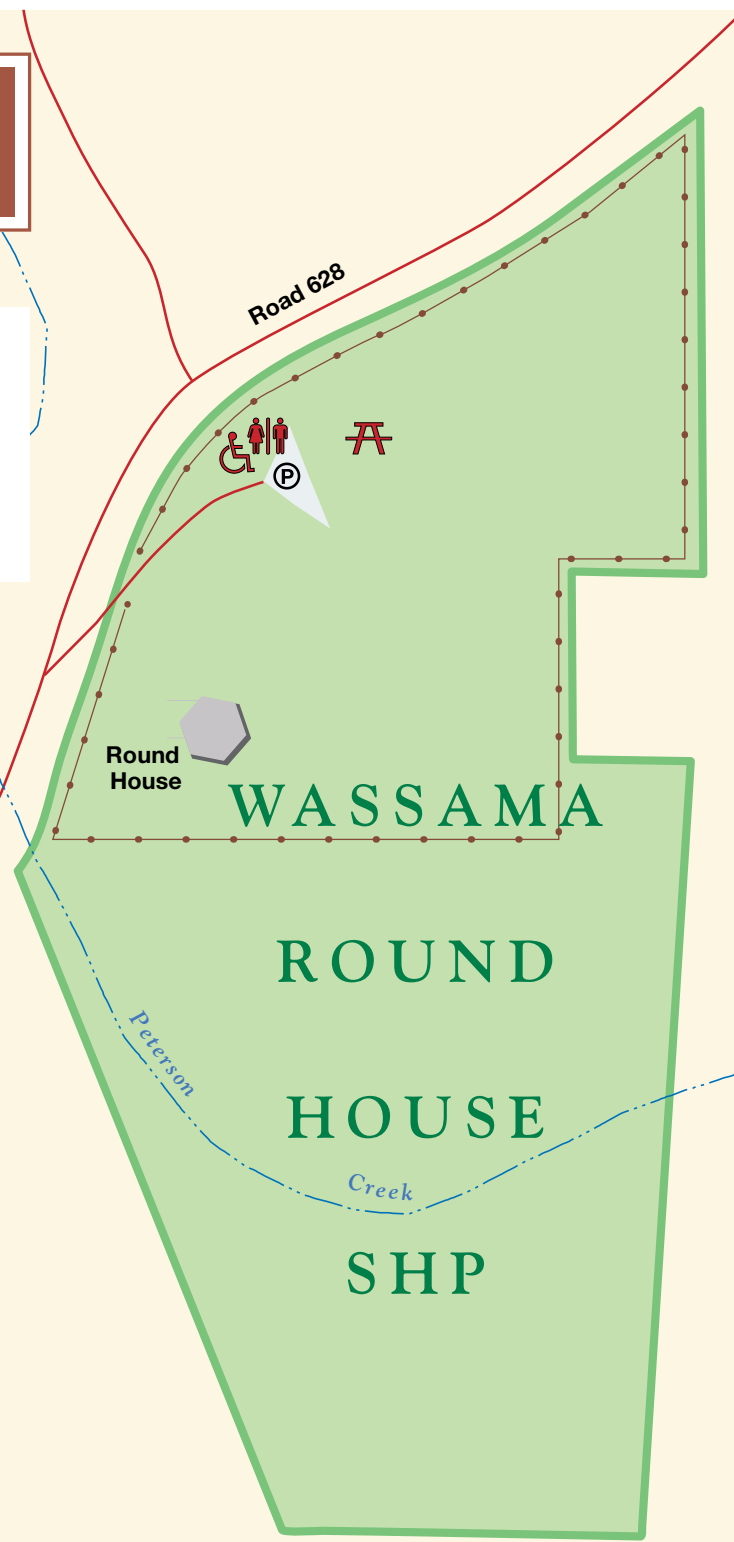
Wassama Round House

State Historic Park

Legend

-  Paved Road
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Fence
-  Accessible Feature
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Restroom

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to Highway 49