

# Calaveras Big Trees State Park



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation 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. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

### **CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**

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For information call: (800) 777-0369

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**Discover the many states of California.™**

**Calaveras Big Trees State Park**

**1170 East Highway 4**

**Arnold, CA 95223**

**(209) 795-2334**

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

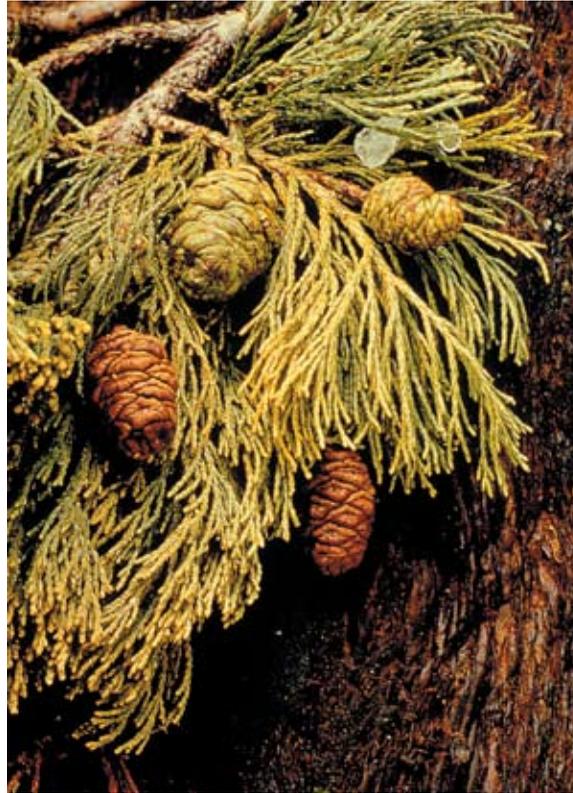




## Three miles north of Arnold off

**Highway 4**, the colossal trees of Calaveras Big Trees State Park stand in quiet testimony to a time when giants ruled the Earth. These massive relics, which can reach a height of 325 feet and a diameter of 33 feet, are a surviving species from a time when dinosaurs roamed, and birds, mammals and flowering plants began to appear. Some of these trees are thought to be as much as 2,000 years old.

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, and wildflowers along the



*Sequoia cones*

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 simply 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 they harvested in the fall were a vital part of their diet. Their way of life was rich in ceremonies and social activities, including the important harvesting and grinding of the fall acorn crop. Throughout this area are large granite outcroppings and boulders with groupings of mortar holes that bear witness to the Miwok method of grinding seeds and acorns. Today, approximately 3,500 Miwok descendants still 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 tree that first caught his attention—known today as the Discovery Tree—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. The word spread rapidly. Newspapers picked up the story, bringing curious visitors and entrepreneurs eager to make their fortunes.

The tree that had earlier stopped Dowd in his tracks was the first casualty in the rush to exploit the giant



*Looking south from the North Grove*

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 who saw it. The financially unsuccessful showing closed, and while the artifacts were awaiting shipment to Paris, a fire destroyed the entire exhibit.

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 and sent to the East Coast and abroad. But people kept coming to Calaveras to see the real thing. In 1861 the Mammoth Grove Hotel was built. The resort hotel operated continually until 1943, when it was destroyed by a fire.

### THE TREES

Two types of redwood trees are native to California—the coast redwood along the central and northern coast and the giant sequoia, which appears in scattered locations along the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Conservationist John Muir was concerned that these giants that had survived the Ice Age and the ravages of time were “...rapidly vanishing before the fire and steel of man...”

In 1878, after a protracted battle over ownership 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, and 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 the 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.

### THE SOUTH GROVE

Unfortunately, the world was now in the throes of the Great Depression. Newton B. Drury, acting as Land Acquisition Officer for the 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.”

It would be 23 more years before the South Grove was acquired. These were years rocked by two wars, on-again, off-again negotiations with the Pickering Lumber Company, revival of the defunct Calaveras Grove Association, and a massive grassroots fundraising campaign. Finally, on April 16, 1954, the primeval wilderness of the Calaveras South Grove became part of Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

### RECREATION

**Camping**—The North Grove Campground has 74 campsites that can accommodate tents and RVs up to 30 feet. The Oak Hollow Campground has 55 campsites for tents and RVs up to 30 feet. All campsites have fire rings and picnic tables, piped water, flush toilets and coin showers. Call (800)444-7275 for reservations.

**Trails**—The North Grove has a level, 1.5-mile self-guided trail. The 600-foot Three Senses Trail allows visitors

to experience the feel, smell and sounds of this magnificent forest. The 5-mile trail in the South Grove travels along Big Trees Creek and passes the park's two largest trees—the Agassiz Tree and the Palace Hotel Tree. The fairly strenuous 4-mile River Trail runs between the North Grove and the Stanislaus River. Along the Lava Bluffs Trail, hikers can enjoy the scenic canyon of the North Fork of the Stanislaus River.



*The Palace Hotel Tree*

**Picnicking/Swimming**—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.

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

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Campsites and restrooms with showers at the North Grove Campground. Some visitors may need help with sloped terrain.
- One campsite and restroom with showers at the Oak Hollow Campground
- Wheelchair seating spaces, parking, assistive listening system at the Campfire Center
- Parking and exhibits at the Visitor Center. Assistance may be needed at entry.
- Parking and .13-mile rope-guided Three Senses interpretive trail (Braille text included) through a forest setting

- Restroom and adjacent parking near warming hut off North Grove parking lot.
- The North Grove Trail is barrier-free.

Accessibility is continually being improved. For current accessibility details, call the park or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Diving is not permitted anywhere in the park; lifeguards are not available.
- Be careful with fire in the park.
- Do not feed the bears and other wildlife that inhabit the park; secure food in the food locker or in your vehicle day and night.
- All trees, plants and animals in the park are protected by law. Please do not disturb, injure or destroy them.
- Dogs are allowed on leash only and are not permitted on trails.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Columbia State Historic Park, 3 miles north of Sonora off Highway 49 (209) 588-9128
- Indian Grinding Rock State Historic Park, 11 miles northeast of Jackson on Pine Grove-Volcano Road (209) 296-7488
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, in Jamestown on 5th Avenue, off Highway 108 (209) 984-3953

# Calaveras Big Trees State Park

- Legend**
- Paved road
  - Unpaved road
  - Trail
  - Accessible Feature
  - Big Trees/Tree Clusters
  - Campfire Center
  - Campground
  - Environmental Campsites
  - Group Campground
  - Group Picnic Area
  - Locked Gate
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Ranger Station
  - Restrooms
  - RV Sanitation Station
  - Showers
  - Telephone
  - Viewpoint

### The North Grove

Not to Scale

### The South Grove

Not to Scale

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

