# A FAMILY GUIDE TO THE GIANT SEQUOIAS

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# Save The Redwoods

GENERAL SHERMAN



#### Dear Friends,

Two children, ages 7 and 3, sit in the sun, munching huckleberries. Suddenly, the 3-year-old waves an arm. "Horsey, horsey," he shouts, as a deer pokes its head out of the forest. The boy gasps—then grins at his discovery. "I pointed it!" he says.

This happy scene is one of many that took place on a camping trip a couple of decades ago. The whole family decided that getting out into nature was the most enjoyable and memorable way to spend time together.

"A Family Guide to the Giant Sequoias" is aimed at families who want to build their own adventures and create their own memories. No outdoor experience necessary. No fat bank account either—camping or renting a cabin or an RV can be among the most economical ways to travel. All you need is a spirit of adventure and a well-thought-out plan.

This guide will help you make that plan. Informed by the century-long experience of Save the Redwoods League, it includes sections on when to go and what types of park and lodging to choose. It describes three parks in the Sierra Nevada, suggesting activities that will make your trip more entertaining and educational. (See "A Family Guide to the Coast Redwoods" for parallel information about redwoods along the California coast.)

Be sure to share your redwood memories with the League at SaveTheRedwoods.org.

Enjoy your trip! Save the Redwoods League







The giant sequoia is a type of redwood that lives in the Sierra Nevada. Mature giant sequoias are not quite as tall as California's coast redwoods, but they are the most massive trees on Earth.

Once you've decided to take your family to the sequoias, there are decisions to make: When should you go? Which park should you choose? Should you camp in a tent, rent an RV or stay in a cabin, lodge or motel? Here are some factors to consider.

#### WHEN: CHOOSING A SEASON

Late spring or summer. If you travel from Memorial Day through Labor Day you avoid times when snow blankets the Sierra Nevada. Campgrounds are generally open, and children's programs are numerous. The downside is lots of company and competition for limited camping spaces, especially in world-famous Yosemite and Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

**Fall, winter, early spring.** In the off-season, everything is quieter . . . and colder. In the Sierra, precipitation has its advantages: giant sequoias look terrific cloaked with snow; you can have fun stomping around on snowshoes or gliding on cross-country skis. But some caveats apply. Many parks and campgrounds are closed. If you find one that's open, you'll need clothing and equipment to match the weather.

WHERE: CHOOSING A PARK On pages 6–9, we profile three parks with great groves of sequoias and excellent children's programs. Choose one of those—or use our Redwoods Finder interactive map to consider a longer list. The map divides California's redwood parks into four zones: Northern, Central and Southern (all coast redwoods), and Sequoia (all in the Sierra).

#### HOW: SLEEPING—OUTSIDE OR IN?

It's easy to reserve a campsite for either a tent or an RV. For national parks or national forests, go to <u>recreation.gov</u> or call (877) 444-6777. From outside the United States and Canada, call (518) 885-3639. For state parks, go to <u>ReserveAmerica.com</u>. Plan well ahead for popular parks in the summer and on holiday weekends.

If camping sounds too rustic, consider renting a cabin—or a room in a motel or lodge. The advantages of motels and lodges are obvious: warm rooms, soft beds, private showers, TVs and wi-fi. The disadvantages? Warm rooms, soft beds, private showers, TVs and wi-fi. In other words, if you're in a place with all the comforts—and distractions—of home, it's less of an adventure than immersing yourself in something amazingly different.

Picture this: You're snug in your sleeping bags, reading a story by flashlight, when a great horned owl says "hoo-hoo-hoo-HOOO," right outside your tent. "Where is my home?" your toddler asks. "Right here, under the stars," you say.



# DREAM

# **EXPLORE**

IF YOU STILL NEED REASONS TO HEAD TO THE SEQUOIAS, HERE ARE JUST A FEW TO THINK ABOUT.

"Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do.
So . . . sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.
Explore. Dream.
Discover."

Mark Twain

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#### **HEALTH AND HAPPINESS INSURANCE.**

Are your kids dazed by too much time with TVs, phones, computers and other electronic gizmos? The more comfortable your family feels in nature, the healthier and happier you'll all be.

A LESSON IN RESPONSIBILITY. Years ago, the people who started Save the Redwoods League joined together to fight for the forests we have today. When you visit a redwood park, your children will learn what they can do to take care of this precious heritage, now and in the future.

A TREAT FOR THE GROWN-UPS. Maybe the best reason for taking your kids to the redwoods is that you yearn to go yourself. You like the tall trees, fresh air and dappled sunlight. You know—or can imagine—what it's like to be cozily nestled in your tent when an owl hoots, coyotes sing or a thunderstorm crackles. It's also a lot of fun just getting away from it all!

Back at home, your family may at times feel fragmented and frazzled. Out in the redwoods, you'll be adopting new rhythms of life as you make memories together.





Which park will be best for your family? Well, it depends on where you live and how much time you have. The following suggestions start in central California and move south. Choose one, or make a grand tour!



#### **THREE GREAT PARKS FOR KIDS**

- 1 CALAVERAS BIG TREES STATE PARK: MULTI-DAY TRIP
- 2 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK: MULTI-DAY TRIP
- 3 SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS: MULTI-DAY TRIP



"I'd encourage people to see Calaveras Big Trees in all four seasons," says park interpreter Jeff Davis. "The dogwoods bloom in the spring, they're thick and green in the summer, and brightly colored in the fall. In winter, they drop their leaves and you can see right through the grove."

#### ACTIVITIES

• From the visitor center, **EXPLORE** the gentle 1.5-mile North Grove Trail, a neck-stretching introduction to the park's massive trees. Guided tours are available every Saturday year-round and every day in the summer. For more information, check <u>online</u> or call (209) 795-3840.

• To see a wilder, quieter grove, drive to the South Grove parking lot. Then **HIKE** 2.5 miles to the largest sequoia in the park: the 250-foot-tall Agassiz Tree, 25 feet in diameter.

• In summer, try one of the park's many **PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN**: Junior Rangers, Cub Rangers, Creek Critters and campfire gatherings with stargazing, storytelling and singing.

• In winter, go **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING** or **SNOWSHOEING**. (The park's elevation is 4,800 feet.)

• Attend a special event, including Family Day on the third Saturday in August or Winter Wonderland in December.

In 1852, a hunter was chasing a wounded grizzly in the central Sierra when he was shocked to discover a forest with trees that were three times bigger than any he'd ever seen before. Today, those giant sequoias (or "Sierra redwoods") still surprise visitors at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

#### LODGING

Calaveras has 74 camping sites near the visitor center and 55 sites in Oak Hollow, about 3 miles down the main park road. It also has five environmental (walkin) sites and two group sites. Call ReserveAmerica at (800) 444-7275 or go <u>online</u> to make a reservation.

#### FOOD

You'll find several good choices in the towns of Arnold and Murphys, 3 miles and 15 miles southwest of the park, respectively.

#### **TRAVEL TIPS**

For the most scenic route from the Bay Area, take Highway 4, along the wildlife-rich Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta.





#### **ACTIVITIES**

• Learn about Yosemite on the National Park Service's science web pages. You can also check out the park's JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM online.

• Once you get to the park, have a look at the **GRIZZLY GIANT** in the Mariposa Grove. One particular limb of this 1,800-year-old sequoia is 7 feet in diameter, thicker than the trunk of any other species of tree in the grove. You can get there either on foot or by tram.

• May through September, take the **MARIPOSA GROVE TRAM** to the end of the line to the Mariposa Grove Museum. If the timing is right, you might catch a spectacular sunset at Wawona Point.

• In winter, **SKI** at <u>Badger Pass</u>, 18 miles from Wawona Hotel. It is usually open from mid-December to mid-March.

• In summer, **SWIM** at Wawona's swinging bridge on the south fork of the Merced River.

• Got a fourth-grader studying California history? Take her or him to Wawona's **PIONEER HISTORY CENTER** and landscape painter Thomas Hill's studio.



You've probably seen Yosemite's rock walls and waterfalls. But have you admired its giant sequoias? If not, head to the south end of the park to visit Mariposa Grove.

#### LODGING

Yosemite has 13 campgrounds—seven of which have sites that can be reserved by calling (877) 444-6777 or going <u>online</u>. For best results, plan ahead.

Indoor lodging is 7 miles away from Mariposa Grove at <u>Wawona Hotel</u> (inside the park) or 4 miles away from Mariposa Grove at <u>Tenaya Lodge</u> (just outside the south entrance). Wawona has a gracious, historic feel, while Tenaya offers an upscale resort experience with a spa, swimming pool and climbing wall. You can also rent houses near the grove at Yosemite West.

#### FOOD

Tenaya Lodge has several restaurants. Wawona Hotel offers hearty meals served in a formal dining room.





Four of the five largest sequoias in the world grow in Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks in the southern Sierra. Allow several days to enjoy the beauty and rich opportunities for learning at these world-class parks.

#### **ACTIVITIES**

• Tip your hat to the most voluminous tree in the world: General Sherman. But don't stop there. From where the General stands, at a trailhead 2 miles south of Lodgepole Visitor Center, continue on the 2-mile-long Congress Trail to see Chief Sequoyah, General Lee, McKinley and many other **MASSIVE TREES**.

• In summer, try one of the free walks-and-talks offered by Sequoia and Kings Canyon. Junior Ranger booklets available at any visitor center describe the **SPECIAL PROGRAMS**—and awards—for age groups 5–8, 9–12 and "13–103." Or check out the Interactive Giant Forest Museum (open seasonally).

• **EXPLORE** Crystal Cave, between Sequoia's Ash Mountain entrance and Giant Forest. Tickets for the strenuous 1-mile cave tour hike are available at Foothills and Lodgepole visitor centers.

• Take a side trip to **GIANT SEQUOIA NATIONAL MONUMENT** (run by the US Forest Service rather than the National Park Service). The monument is less well known than the adjacent park but contains almost half the sequoia groves in the entire Sierra Nevada.



#### LODGING

Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks have nearly 1,200 sites in 14 campgrounds. In most cases, sites are assigned on a first-come-firstserved basis. Reservations are taken for Lodgepole and Dorst Creek in the summer. Reservations may be available for large groups (20+ people) in other campgrounds. Call (877) 444-6777 or go to recreation.gov.

Wuksachi Lodge provides modern, upscale facilities inside the park, 4 miles from the Giant Forest Museum. For more indoor options, visit <u>www.nps</u> .gov/seki/planyourvisit/lodging.htm.

#### FOOD

Food is available in the park, with more options during the busy summer season. Save the Redwoods League staff recommend the following: In the summer, enjoy an outdoor western barbeque at <u>Wuksachi Lodge</u>. Between Sequoia and Kings Canyon, try family-friendly dinners at <u>Montecito</u> <u>Sequoia Lodge</u> or burgers and shakes at <u>Hume</u> <u>Lake</u>. In the town of Three Rivers, try <u>Sierra Subs</u> <u>and Salads</u>. For ice cream, stop at <u>Reimer's</u> <u>Candies</u>.

#### **TRAVEL TIPS**

In the summer, free shuttle buses (<u>www.nps.gov/</u> <u>seki/planyourvisit/parktransit.htm</u>) help visitors explore Sequoia National Park. You can hop on or off at most of the park's popular attractions.

# WHAT TO BRING



You want your trip to be safe, fun, exciting and maybe even educational. To increase the chances of success, consider bringing some of these items.

**LAYERS.** In the rainy season, pack warm hats, scarves, mittens and plenty of thick, fast-drying socks. And don't forget the raincoats and rainpants. If you are camping with messy eaters, dress them in rainsuits at dinnertime to protect their clothes. After dinner, just sponge them off!

**EXTRA PLASTIC BAGS.** To keep young children warm and happy when it's wet, put small plastic bags over the socks on their feet and then put on their shoes.

**WHISTLES.** Bring one for each child to wear on a string around his or her neck. Blow in emergency, e.g., when separated from his or her parents.

**BANDANAS.** Bring a few of these colorful cotton squares to use as scarves, placemats, napkins, sweatbands, washcloths, blindfolds, bandages, arm slings and more.

**FOOD.** Keep it simple! Have snacks to keep kids cheery on long car rides: fruit, nuts, carrots, celery, string cheese, peanut butter and crackers are good possibilities. In camp, older children can be chefs and you can be the scullery maid(s). Or vice versa. But don't try to do everything yourself. That's no fun for anybody. Mac and cheese, anyone? **EDIBLE HIKING INCENTIVES.** Take a small stash of special treats. Use them on the trail for an energy boost or incentive for accomplishment. Let's say a child with a flair for drama is lying flat on the trail. "My legs are broken," she says. "But I have lemon drops," you reply. "If you walk for 15 minutes without stopping, we'll stop and have some." Suddenly, miraculously . . . the legs begin to move.

A FIELD GUIDE. Books about trees, birds, rocks, flowers and mushrooms are readily available at park gift shops. Choose a simple, sturdy one, and let an older child be your guide.

**BINOCULARS.** These are especially important if you want to learn about birds.

A STAR CHART (or smartphone application). You've seen the night sky at home, but when it's shining brightly outside your tent, you'll all be the more curious about what you're seeing.

A SONGBOOK. *Rise Up Singing* by Peter Blood and Annie Patterson (Sing Out Publications) offers the words and chords to 1,200 songs: folk, blues, gospel, pop oldies and show tunes, with at least one shout-out to redwoods (in Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land").



**PLAYING CARDS.** Have some in your entertainment bag. You might also consider a specialized pack of cards, *52 Nature Activities* by Lynn Gordon (Chronicle Books), that encourages drawing, writing, listening and learning.

**A BALL.** There was once a small boy who liked camping well enough, but loved baseball even more. So his family slipped a deflated beach ball into the car. When they arrived at camp, they blew it up and used a stick (or a fishing pole case) as a bat. Instant happiness!

TOOLS FOR THINKING AND REMEMBERING. Bring

notebooks or journals, markers or colored pencils, and cameras. If your child is too young or doesn't feel like writing or drawing, he or she can dictate a story or journal entry to you. Cameras are another way of focusing attention on what's around you. Consider bringing one for each older child. Or use your smartphone(s)! A RELAXED ATTITUDE TOWARD DIRT. We know one mother who felt she had to give her children a bath every night, no matter what. It only took three days for her to decide that camping was way too much work. So she missed out on the family's best times together. Don't let it happen to you. Be sanitary, but don't worry about the dirt that naturally adheres to multi-day adventurers.

**A CALM OUTLOOK.** Learn about the hazards where you're going (mosquitoes? nettles? poison oak? ticks? mountain lions?). Then take sensible precautions, knowing that families have been safely camping out in the redwoods for decades.

**REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS.** There will be times when "all your good feelings go to Antarctica," as one young camper described it. You'll wish you had left the kids with relatives or friends. At those times, remember that connecting your kids to nature is a long-term project. Your reward may be the trip itself. Or it may come a decade or two later, when a grateful grown child pulls you aside and says, "Remember that time we went camping in the redwoods?"

CONNECTING Your Kids to Nature IS A Long-term Project. If you want to boost the educational value of your travels—and have more fun—try a few of the activities suggested below.

Help your children explore the web for sequoiarelated materials. First, check out the web page of the park you want to visit. If it's a unit of the national park system (Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon) you'll see a "for kids" option in the homepage navigation menu. That's where you'll find out about special events, programs and materials for kids. Additional web resources for nature activities are available on the California State Parks "Kids in Parks" page.

Sequoia

stem

WHAT

to do

**AT HOME** 

#### SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE LEARNING CENTER.

Our <u>online Learning Center</u> will help you create an excellent bag of travel tricks.

**GAMES.** <u>Download games</u> such as "Redwoods Bingo," "What Doesn't Belong," "Redwoods Tracks," "How Tall Is a Redwood?" and "Date a Tree." Or print out pages for coloring, sketching and poetry activities.

In one of the games, kids compare human heights to the stature of a 320-foot coast redwood. (If you're curious, it is about as tall as 80 4-foot kids or 53 6-foot parents!) In another, they learn how to read the animal tracks they'll be seeing on the forest floor (those of salamanders, owls, mountain lions and more). In another, they're asked to draw a picture of what a redwood forest might have looked like a hundred years ago—or what it might look like a hundred years from today.

**DOWNLOAD BOOKLETS.** In addition, the League offers downloable booklets on coast redwoods and sequoias that are tailored for different grade levels. There's also a list of books you can get at the library, organized by age group: everything from *Hannah and the Talking Tree*, a story by Elke Weiss, and *Who Pooped in the Park?*, a story by Gary D. Robson, to *Julia Butterfly Hill: Saving the Redwoods*, non-fiction by Rachel Lynette. Don't be surprised if you end up checking out some titles for yourself.

WEBSITES. Finally, the League's list of redwood websites can help you dig even deeper into redwood lore. One California State Parks page, "Imagine, Experience, Explore the Redwood Neighborhood," uses art, soaring music and sound effects to help you identify and learn about plants and animals in the redwood forest. Older children can go to the California Academy of Sciences site to learn about burls, fairy rings, goose pens and marbled murrelets. Humboldt State University's site offers a slide show of researchers measuring trees, installing data monitors and exploring treetop ecosystems. A KQED video focuses on rare albino redwoods, the "phantoms of the forest."

# WHAT TO DO IN THE CAR



Your kids can dip into the bag of travel tricks you downloaded (see facing page) and work independently. But doing things together can be fun—and strengthen family ties. Here are a few suggestions.



**PLAY "REDWOOD 20 QUESTIONS."** Think of something found in the sequoias and then let the other players ask up to 20 yes-or-no questions to figure out what it is. The first person to guess correctly starts the next round.

#### PLAY A BIRDERS' VERSION OF "I SPY."

The lead player spots a bird outside and says "I spy, with my little eye, something [color]!" Others in the car try to name the bird.

**READ A BOOK ALOUD.** For redwoodsrelated suggestions, see <u>the League's list</u>.

#### WATCH A MOVIE SET IN THE REDWOODS.

Are you set up to have your kids watch movies in your car? If so, try one filmed in the redwood forest. Some possibilities: *Return of the Jedi, The Lost World: Jurassic Park 2,* or *Rise of the Planet of the Apes.* 

# WHAT TO DO IN THE PARK

You're in the park. There's no TV and you've all turned off your electronic devices. You've stretched your legs, inhaled the fresh air and said hello to the friendly folks in the visitor center. What's next?

First, find out if there's a self-guided trail nearby. That's often a good introduction to what the park has to offer. Or is there a river you can safely splash in? A sunny place where you can picnic? A not-toosteep hill you can climb?

Pick interesting goals, but make sure they are right for your kids, not what you might have done with your buddies a few years ago. If your family is inclined to look and listen (or gather acorns, climb trees or make a leaf collection) rather than march down the trail, be flexible. It's not how far you go; it's how much fun you have.

### HIKES WITH-A-PURPOSE

Hiking can be puzzling to children. People with long legs are telling them to walk and walk for no apparent reason? Kids want to be doing something. Help them hone their observational skills with one or more of these hikes-with-a-purpose. IT'S NOT HOW FAR YOU GO; It's how much Fun you have.

WALK A TRAIL, stopping every 10 steps to draw something you see: an animal track, spider web, fern, flower, feather, fish, cone, scat (poop), bird, insect, banana slug and so forth. On its <u>transect</u> <u>page</u> Save the Redwoods League describes what to bring, look for and do.

**PLAY THE REDWOOD BINGO GAME.** Like the transect walk above, it involves observation, with no drawing required.

**WALK IN PAIRS,** with one person leading and the other person blindfolded. Have the blindfolded person describe what he or she hears, smells and feels. Then switch.

**COUNT BUGS OR BIRDS** you see in one hike. If you can't identify them, don't worry. It's mostly about noticing the variety and the differences.

**COUNT ANIMAL HOMES** you can find. Speculate about who might live in each.

**EXPLORE A SEQUOIA STUMP** or a goose pen (a hollowed out sequoia with open space in the middle). While being respectful of other visitors and nature, play hide-and-seek in the forest.

**WALK IN SILENCE** for a certain length of time. Then talk about what you heard.

## WHAT TO DO IN THE PARK



#### PHOTOGRAPHY

If sketching lacks appeal, try photography—possibly taking one camera for each (older) child. Or use a smartphone and instantly send your work to Grandma! Photography is another way of focusing attention on what's around you—and creating lasting memories.For inspiration, have a look at our photo library.

#### **PARK PROGRAMS**

Calaveras Big Trees State Park has an active Junior Ranger program for your child to play games, take hikes, learn and explore with other children. Or the whole family can work its way through the 16-page Junior Ranger Adventure Guide together. <u>Download the guide</u>, pick it up at the visitor center or call (916) 653-8959 to order a copy.

The National Park Service also has Junior Ranger programs at Sequoia and Yosemite. In Sequoia National Park, for example, children 5 to 8 years old can earn the Jay Award, children 9 to 12 can earn a Raven Award and the older crowd, folks "13 to 103" can earn a senior patch. Find out more on the web.

Calaveras also has a "litter-getters" program—a way of earning prizes while helping keep the park clean. Stop at the entrance kiosk to pick up your litter-getter bag and gloves. When you've filled the bag with litter, you earn a sticker. After six stickers, you're eligible for an official litter-getter recycled pencil. All ages can participate.

#### **SKETCHING AND WRITING**

You brought several notebooks along with markers or colored pencils, right? If your child sees something exciting, encourage him or her to stop and sketch it. When you get back to camp, you can look over your sketches and write about your day, or your child can dictate a journal entry to you—or tell you a story.

The goal of this effort is not to draw or write like a pro, but to observe like an eagle. When you get home, you can send your children's best sketches and writingsto be considered for our online gallery. But, whatever you do, save those journals—a priceless record ofyour family's discoveries in the sequoias.

#### **AT CAMP**

You've had dinner, cleaned up, brushed your teeth and used up the last of your quarters in the state-park showers. But it's still early. How about bundling up to take a little walk? Dusk might reward you with a chorus of frogs, a varied thrush solo or an owl serenade.

Later in the evening, don't forget to gaze up at the stars. Or you can read, tell stories and converse. Ask your children what forest animal they'd each like to be. Then ask them which animal is most like their sibling, friend, parent or grandparent. Don't take it personally if you turn out to be the banana slug.

# READY FOR ACTION

You've come home inspired by your visit to the giant sequoias! Here are some ways your family can take action to protect these ancient trees and the forests that surround them.

#### TAKE THE PLEDGE

You can start by <u>signing a pledge</u> offered by Save the Redwoods League. "I can help redwoods!" is the main idea, followed by a checklist of actions, including "educate yourself" and "experience the redwoods," which you've already done if you've visited the redwoods. Other actions include "spread the word," "plant a native tree," "reduce, reuse, recycle" and "volunteer."

#### LEARN ABOUT THREATS

A combination of climate change, pollution, habitat loss and invasive species is making life difficult for redwoods and redwood ecosystems today. You can learn more from the EPA's online publication <u>"A</u> <u>Student's Guide to Global Climate Change,"</u> the US Department of Energy's <u>science education pages</u> and the <u>National Park Service's "Web Rangers" pages</u>.

#### **JOIN A GROUP**

Find out how you can <u>help Save the Redwoods League</u> and other groups working to protect redwood forests.

#### **BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST**

The League's <u>Redwoods and Climate Change Initiative</u> is a joint effort with the University of California at Berkeley and Humboldt State University. You and your family can help their efforts through the League's Redwood Watch program. Find a sequoia or coast redwood in your own backyard or in a botanical garden anywhere in the world. A tree on the edge of redwoods' natural range would be particularly interesting, but anywhere will do. Then use the free <u>Redwood Watch iPhone application</u> or your own camera to take a photo of the tree and submit it online. Your efforts will help scientists amass good data on where redwoods are growing today, so they'll be better able to predict where the forests of tomorrow can thrive.

> WHEN YOU VISIT A SEQUOIA PARK, YOUR CHILDREN WILL BE INSPIRED TO PROTECT THIS PRECIOUS HERITAGE.



Save The Redwoods LEAGUE®

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