

Castle Rock 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 (408) 867-2952. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

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

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SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Castle Rock State Park

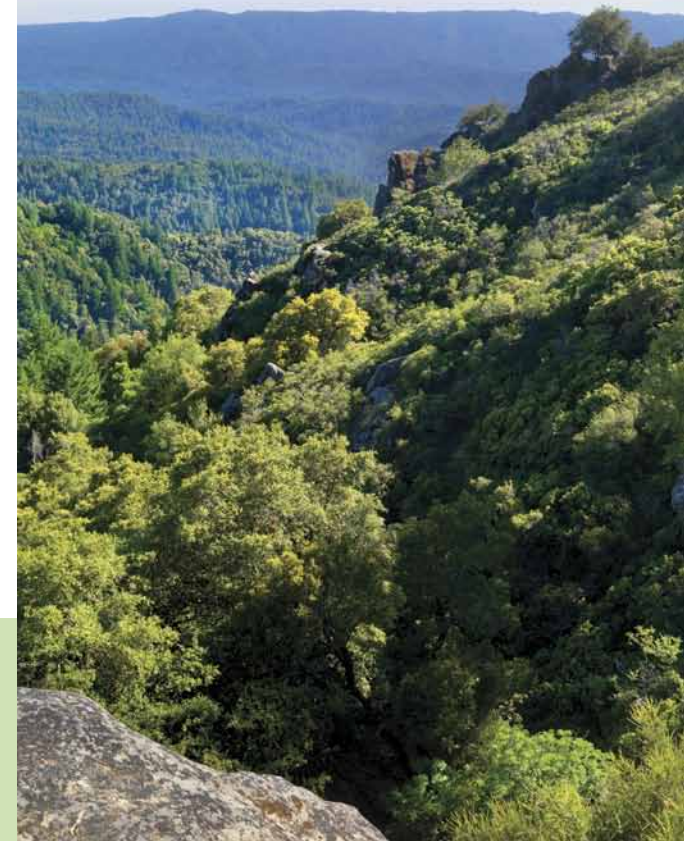
15000 Skyline Boulevard

Los Gatos, CA 95030

(408) 867-2952

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*Exquisite sandstone
formations and
windswept caves are
among the treasured
features within this
park's vast wilderness.*



Castle Rock State Park is a place where solitude and wilderness mix with high cliffs and sweeping vistas. Abundant sandstone with unique weathering patterns, lush forests and stream-fed canyons create the park's amazing diversity.

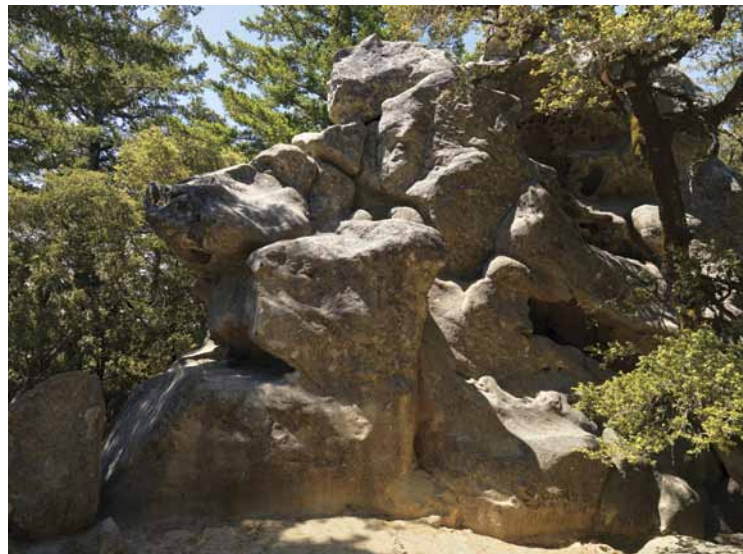
From one of the highest ridges of the Santa Cruz Mountains, visitors enjoy panoramic views of Monterey Bay. Encompassing more than 5,500 acres of wilderness and 35 miles of trails, the park is popular with rock climbers, hikers and equestrians. Trails connect to nearby state parks and open space preserves, expanding visitor travel from the skyline to the sea.

Summer weather is hot and dry. Cold winters see more rainfall than other Bay Area locations. Mountain peaks may be dusted with snow, and temperatures can drop well below freezing.

CULTURAL HISTORY

Native People

The park is located between what once were the territories of many different tribal communities. Over thousands of years, the tribes of the region have come to be collectively recognized as the Ohlone people. Several native camp areas in this location served the native people's dietary and spiritual needs. Ohlone visionaries used the massive rocks to communicate with what they considered to be the spirit world and to acquire personal enlightenment. They also collected a wide variety of medicinal and food plants.



Castle Rock—one of many sandstone outcrops in the park

Native people hunted deer, pronghorns and bears that were attracted to the area's abundant vegetation. Today's park lies within a major trail system that was used to move resources from the coast into the interior.

Gold Fever

By 1849, thousands of immigrants had arrived in California searching for gold. The newcomers needed lumber to construct homes and buildings for new towns. The South Pacific Coast Railroad built new lines for access between the Santa Cruz mountains and the Alameda port. By 1884, 28 lumber mills operated in the Big Basin/San Lorenzo Valley area; the mills yielded more than 34 million board feet of lumber each year. Coast redwood made excellent lumber, and tanoak bark was used to tan leather goods. Once-thick forests were rapidly laid bare.

Agriculture

Agriculture also altered the Castle Rock landscape for nearly 100 years. Farming,

livestock, hunting, fishing and trading made it possible for area families to be self-sufficient.

The Smead and Partridge Farms were the largest operations on the ridge, with orchards of apples pears, walnuts and grapes. Near the park's Interpretive Shelter, heritage trees planted in the early 1900s still bear fruit.

Creation of the Park

Judge Joseph Welch of Santa Clara Valley purchased a 60-acre parcel on Castle Rock Ridge in 1908, when logging was still ravaging the hillsides. He established a precedent by opening his land for the public to enjoy its scenic vistas and rugged landscapes. With Welch's determination, Castle Rock soon became a popular tourist destination.

Dr. Russell Varian, a pioneer of x-ray and radar technology, spent much of his youth exploring and hiking the canyons near Castle Rock. Varian was the first to measure Earth's magnetic field, using some sites in today's park. In 1959, he secured an option to purchase this land and planned to donate it to California State Parks. Varian died before completing the purchase. The Sierra Club and Sempervirens Fund later donated the land in his memory. In July of 1968, Castle Rock was designated a state park.

NATURAL HISTORY

Wildly eroded sandstone formations create prominent ridges in the park's canyons. A waterfall fed by natural

springs cascades 100 feet down the steep mountain slopes to the San Lorenzo River. The river flowing through the park provides spawning habitat for steelhead. Steep trails lead to the unusual rock formations at Varian Peak, Goat Rock, Russell Point and Castle Rock.

Geology

Castle Rock's famed sandstone outcrops originated as submarine fan deposits on the continental shelf about 30 to 40 million years ago. These shelf deposits were then elevated and moved north by repeated violent movements along the tectonic plate boundaries now defined by the San Andreas Fault. All of the rocks west of the fault line are fundamentally different from the rocks on the east side.

The uniquely sculpted, rounded rock outcrops along Castle Ridge have eroded to form pits, pockets, ribs and ridges. Referred to as tafoni, these erosional patterns have endless variations—from pock marks to honeycombed surfaces and large concretions and caverns. These complex patterns form under



Observation deck at Castle Rock Falls

repeated exposures to rain and drought over eons, and embellish on natural internal structural variations, such as cracks and joint patterns in the rock.

Vegetation

Castle Rock State Park is recovering from years of agricultural use and logging that has caused significant vegetation changes. The park hosts diverse native and non-native plant communities: mixed evergreen forest, black oak forest, chaparral, grasslands and riparian woodland. Spring flowers display a colorful palette: pink or purple Chinese houses, lilac slender phlox, deep blue sky lupine, pink farewell-to-spring, and golden elegant madia all thrive on the hillsides.

Virgin- and second-growth redwoods grow at an unusual elevation, above 2,500 feet along Saratoga Gap Trail. Their low water supply accounts for these dwarf redwood trees' uncommonly short 40- to 100-foot heights.

Climate change affects all living things within the redwood forest. Experts fear that the area's increase in average temperature and decrease in rain and thick summer fog will endanger redwoods and other plants and creatures that depend on the redwood environment.

Animal life

Wild animals and reptiles seen in the park include coastal black-tailed deer, gray foxes, coyotes, California newts, mountain lions and many species of snakes.

Turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, acorn woodpeckers, quail and scrub jays may be spotted. Golden eagles and peregrine falcons soar overhead.



Peregrine falcon



From Summit Meadows Trail, a view of Monterey Bay in the distance

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Castle Rock State Park is part of a regional trail system linking the park with the San Francisco Bay Area and the Santa Cruz coast. The two major trail corridors—the Skyline to the Sea and Bay Ridge trails—lead hikers and backpackers through steep canyons, dense old-growth redwood forests, creeks and fields of wildflowers.

Picnics—The Partridge Farm site has picnic tables and an interpretive shelter.

Camping—Two trail camps—Castle Rock with 20 primitive sites and Waterman Gap with 6 primitive sites—are available. Both camps have water and pit toilets. An inclement-weather shelter at Castle Rock Trail Camp provides a roof during storms.

Hiking and backpacking trails—

The park offers 35 miles of nature trails, many with steep and narrow slopes. The Skyline-to-the-Sea trail connects Castle Rock and Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The 5.6 mile Saratoga Gap Loop leads to Goat Rock, Castle Rock Falls, Russel Point Overlook and the Castle Rock Trail Camp. Goat Rock provides panoramic views of the San Lorenzo Valley and the Pacific Ocean. The moderately difficult Ridge Trail is an excellent place to see the endangered peregrine falcon. The Saratoga Toll Road, a historic logging road and stagecoach line from 1871, is now a well-shaded and graded hike offering some scenic viewpoints.



ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

An accessible trail is about 0.08-mile long and leads to an outstanding vista and picnic area. The trailhead is located at Castle Rock parking lot. Parking, pit toilet and picnic table at end of trail may require assistance. Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, call (916) 445-8949 or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Big Basin Redwoods State Park
21600 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek 95006
(408) 338-8860
- Butano State Park, 1500 Cloverdale Road
Pescadero 94060 (650) 879-2040
- Portola Redwoods State Park
9000 Portola State Park Road
La Honda 94020 (650) 948-9098

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Park hours: open from 6 a.m. to sunset, including all trails. Only campers registered in backpack trail camps may remain in the park overnight.
- Dogs (except for service animals), bicycles, glass containers and smoking are prohibited throughout the entire park.
- Firearms or any device capable of injuring or killing any person or animal are prohibited—including BB guns, spears, bows, arrows and slingshots.
- Fires are permitted only in designated fire rings in the Castle Rock Trail Camp during the OFF fire season. Gathering firewood, including twigs and leaves, is prohibited. Firewood is sold at the Castle Rock Trail Camp.
- Quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily.
- Please respect private property rights and stay on designated trails.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law. Do not pick wildflowers, mushrooms or other plants, or remove any park feature. Do not feed, disturb or harm wildlife.
- Beware of rattlesnakes, ticks and poison oak in camp and on trails.
- Horses are permitted on designated equestrian trails only. Please check the map before your ride.

This park is supported in part through:
Portola and Castle Rock Foundation
9000 Portola State Park Road, Box F
La Honda, CA 94020 • (650) 948-9098

ROCK CLIMBING

Castle Rock State Park provides a popular site to hike and rock climb. Climbers have scaled the park's outcrops of Vaqueros Sandstone, Castle Rock and Goat Rock for nearly a century. The sandstone's relatively hard exterior and unique tafoni patterns are ideal for bouldering and rock climbing.

To preserve the character of these unique rock formations and minimize the impact on soils, vegetation, wildlife, other climbers and visitors, Castle Rock State Park supports "Leave No Trace" practices, which include proper disposal of trash and protection of natural resources.

Observe all park rules and closures—Climbing and other off-trail activities are not permitted in the San Lorenzo Headwaters Natural Preserve. Check park bulletin boards



before climbing for notice of possible restrictions to protect nesting birds, other wildlife and areas recovering from overuse.

Limit bolting—Before placing new bolts or replacing old ones, climbers are required to notify the park and receive approval. Please contact the park in advance to initiate a request for bolting.

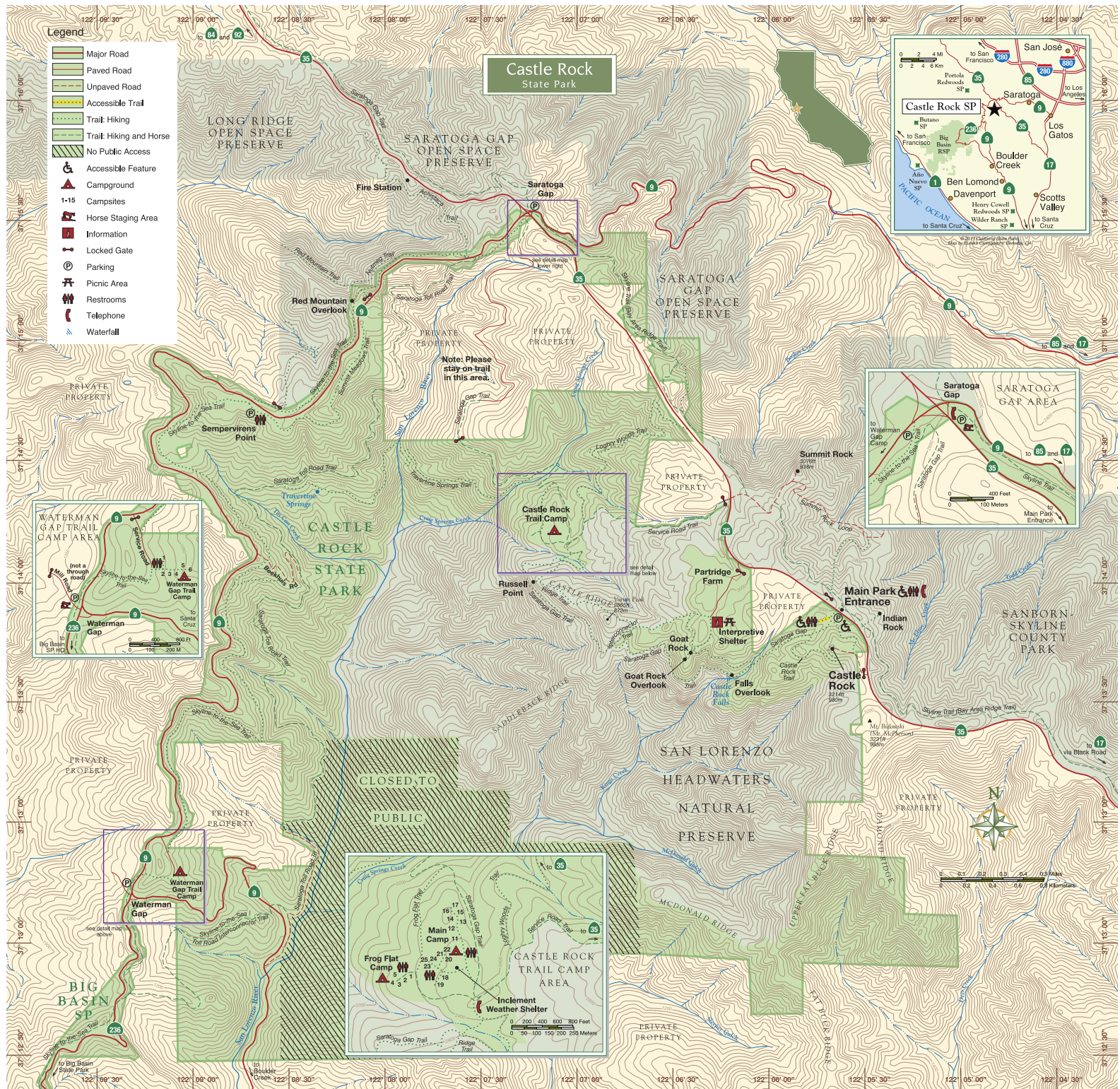
Help prevent erosion—Use only existing access trails. Please carry (rather than drag) crash pads. The park's topsoil is fragile and easily displaced from the steep slopes in much of the park.

Protect park vegetation—The park is home to a variety of mosses, plants and trees that provide food and shelter for wildlife. Please avoid damaging mosses, lichens and branches.

Respect the integrity of the rock and the climb—Please do not chip, glue, remove or otherwise alter the rock. Please allow two or three days after a heavy rain before climbing. Sandstone becomes much more fragile when damp.

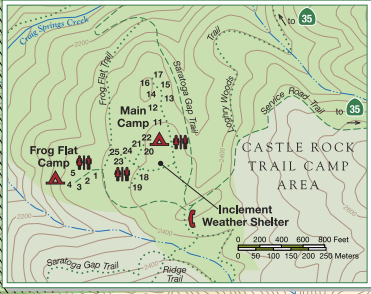
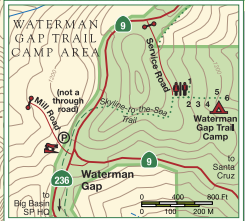
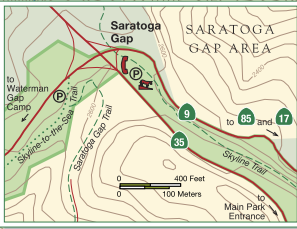
Rock climbing classes—Ropes classes and similar activities (whether held by private, educational, nonprofit or commercial groups) require advance permits and insurance. For permit applications, call (408) 867-2952.





- Legend**
- Major Road
 - Paved Road
 - Unpaved Road
 - Accessible Trail
 - Trail: Hiking
 - Trail: Hiking and Horse
 - No Public Access
 - Accessible Feature
 - Campground
 - Campsites
 - Horse Staging Area
 - Information
 - Locked Gate
 - Parking
 - Picnic Area
 - Restrooms
 - Telephone
 - Waterfall

Castle Rock State Park



CLOSED TO PUBLIC

Note: Please stay on trail in this area.