

# 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**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

**CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**  
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For information call: (800) 777-0369.  
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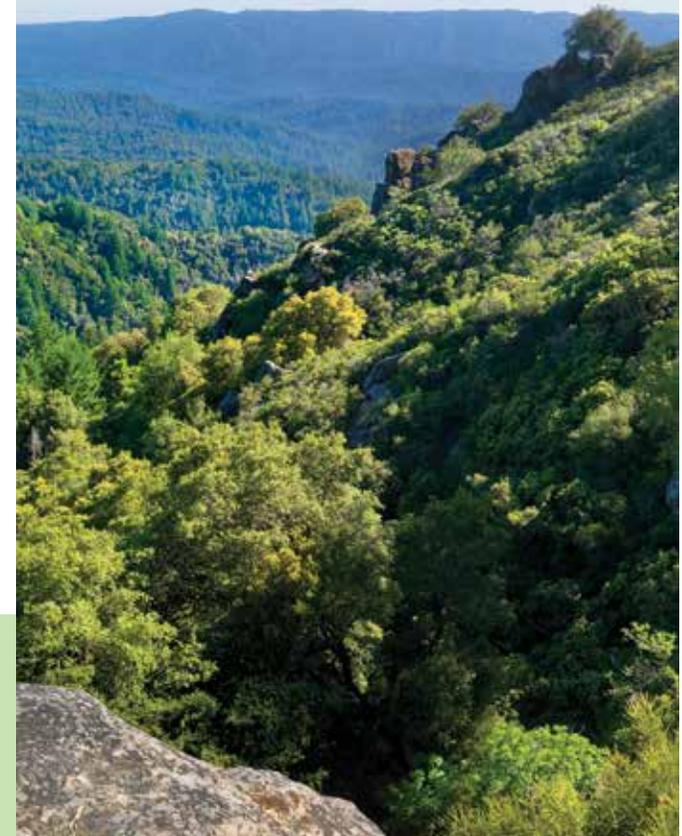
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[SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp](http://SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp)

**Castle Rock State Park**  
15000 Skyline Boulevard  
Los Gatos, CA 95030  
**(408) 867-2952**

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



**C**astle Rock State Park is a place of abundant solitude, wilderness, high cliffs and sweeping vistas. Unique patterns on weathered sandstone, lush forests and stream-fed canyons make up the park's diverse features.

From one of the highest ridges in the Santa Cruz Mountains, visitors enjoy panoramic views of Monterey Bay. Encompassing more than 5,150 acres of wilderness and 34 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.

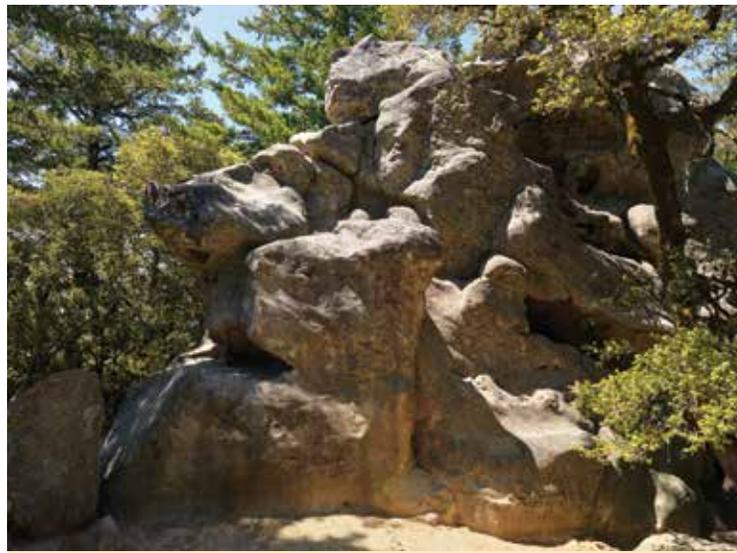
Summer weather is hot and dry. In winter, mountain peaks may be dusted with snow, and temperatures can drop below freezing.

## CULTURAL HISTORY

### Native People

The park is located among what once was home to many different tribal communities. Over thousands of years, the tribes of the region have come to be collectively recognized as the Ohlone people. Several areas in this location served their dietary and spiritual needs. Ohlone visionaries used the massive rocks to connect to their spiritual world and to acquire personal enlightenment. They also collected a wide variety of medicinal and food plants.

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



*Castle Rock—one of many sandstone outcrops in the park*

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 75 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 with repeated exposure to erosion from blowing sand, water and chemical and physical changes over eons.



*Observation deck at Castle Rock Falls*

### 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 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 34 miles of nature trails, many with steep and narrow slopes. The Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail connects Castle Rock and Big Basin Redwoods State Parks. The 5.6-mile Saratoga Gap and Ridge Trail Loop leads to Goat Rock, Castle Rock Falls, Russell Point Overlook and the Castle Rock Trail Camp. Goat Rock Overlook 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

The 0.08-mile accessible path from Castle Rock parking lot leads to an ADA-compliant picnic table with woodland views. Parking and pit toilet at the end of the trail may require assistance.

Accessibility in state parks is continually improving. For updates, visit the website at <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Big Basin Redwoods State Park  
21600 Big Basin Way  
Boulder Creek 95006 (831) 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), glass containers and smoking are prohibited throughout the entire park.
- Bicycles may be ridden only on the Skyline and Service Road trails.
- Horses are permitted on designated equestrian trails only. Please check the map before your ride.
- Firearms or any device capable of harming 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.

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  
[www.portolaandcastlerockfound.org](http://www.portolaandcastlerockfound.org)

## 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 requires low-impact climbing and supports "Leave No Trace" practices. Properly dispose of all trash and protect park 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 plants and trees 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
  - Multi-Use Trail: Hiking, Horse, and Bicycle
  - Accessible Feature
  - Campground
  - Horse Staging Area
  - Information
  - Locked Gate
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Restrooms
  - Telephone
  - Waterfall

**Castle Rock State Park**

