

Almanac '85

It all began at Big Basin, where majesty still reigns

BOULDER CREEK — Big Basin is where it all began. When people wanted to protect the Coastal Redwoods, the initial successful effort began there. Big Basin Redwoods State Park was born 81 years ago and it stands today as a stately reminder that it was the very first location in the California State Park System.

Upwards of 200,000 visitors per-year — including both tourists and Santa Cruz County residents who are captivated by the area's natural beauty — come to Big Basin Redwoods State Park. They don't go home disappointed, because the park has not lost any of its charm since it was created in 1904.

The park is located a short distance north of Boulder Creek on Big Basin Way.

The park's birth process actually began in 1900 with the formation of the Sempervirens Club, dedicated to preserving the stately redwoods. The club members persuaded the state Legislature in 1902 to pay \$250,000 for 3,900 acres in the area of Governor's Camp. It became Big Basin Redwood State Park and has endured in the past 80-plus years.

Its early history was marred by a fire a few months after the park opened in 1904. Everyone available was pressed into service to battle the blaze, which required 3 days to extinguish. It affected everything in the park except the area immediately around park headquarters.

The Big Basin Nature Lodge features displays of plants and animals that can be found in the area. The lodge is a popular spot for park visitors, who for years have enjoyed the real-life exhibits of mammals, reptiles and bird life as well as native-plant drawings and a description of the life cycle of the redwoods for which Big Basin is famous.

In another section of the museum, the human history of Big Basin is told. Among the displays are authentic early logging tools. The turn-of-the-century photographs are by photographer Andrew P. Hill, who was instrumental in saving the Big Basin redwoods.

Hill and other conservation-minded pioneers, founded the Sempervirens Club in 1900.

Park visitors have been thrilled for more than eight decades by taking short historic tours through the state's very first park. Those trips have taken — and continue to take, much to the delight of people who continue to visit the same park previous generations of their families loved — many forms.

There are numerous tours available for both individuals and groups. Those trips include:

TRIP "A"

LOCATION — Headquarters area, Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

LENGTH — One-quarter mile.

1. PARK HEADQUARTERS — Built in 1935 by the Civilian Conservation Corps company headquartered in Big Basin at a cost of \$2,724.03, this building now

houses the park office and the Sempervirens Room, which was originally used for special events and exhibits.

2. NATURE LODGE — The Civilian Conservation Corps also built the Nature Lodge in 1938.

It was originally used as a lunch room and converted to a museum in the late 1940s. It was the first permanent museum to be operated in any California state park.

Park officials encourage visitors to start their historic tours here, lingering awhile to enjoy the more than 80 years of park life on display.

3. REDWOOD INN — Built about 1915, this hotel is the oldest building in the park. Note carefully the hand-hewed timbers on the porch.

Reaching its height in popularity during the 30 years beginning in 1920, it accommodated guests in the cabins nearby. Guests could enjoy tennis, "quoits" and shuffleboard.

Swimming and boating on Opal Creek also were offered. In 1942, the Redwood Inn was the site of the movie "The Forest Rangers," featuring Fred MacMurray, Susan Hayward and Paulette Goddard.

4. GOVERNOR'S CAMP — Sites one through three made up the area known as Governor's Camp, so named in honor of Gov. Gage's visit in 1902 and Gov. Pardee's visit in 1903. Other visitors have included such notables as Bret Harte, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edwin Markham, John Muir and Rudyard Kipling.

5. CAMP FIRE CENTER — The original Camp Fire Center (also on this spot) was first in use during Warden William Dool's administration (1911-1928).

Dool organized campers to participate in amateur shows, which are said to have been very entertaining. The Camp Fire Center was enlarged in 1938, but the original redwood log seats were kept in use.

During the summer season, this is the hub of daily interpretive activities in Big Basin.

REDWOOD TRAIL — This self-guided nature trail contains such trees and the Mother Tree, once thought to be the world's tallest tree. There's also the Santa Clara Tree, named in honor of Santa Clara University, whose president played an important role in acquisition of the park.

The trees were named by early visitors before Big Basin was established as a park. This area has always been the Basin's major attraction.

TRIP "B"

DESTINATION — Round-trip from Big Basin State Park headquarters.

ROUTE — Via Sequoia Trail and Skyline to the Sea Trail.

DISTANCE — Four miles for round-trip.

7. SEMPVIRENS FALLS — In the early years, the Sempervirens Club used this area for its camping grounds. Early photos (1904) show the falls to be much as they are now.

W. W. Richards, a sportsman and founding member of the Sempervirens Club, claims to

have once pulled 93 fish out of the pool below these falls in one day.

8. SLIPPERY ROCK MEMORIAL, State Historic Landmark No. 827 — It was near this spot on May 18, 1900, that the Sempervirens Club was organized to preserve the redwoods of Big Basin.

The rallying cry, "Save the Redwoods," caught on statewide; in September 1902, this area became the California Redwood Park — California's first state park.

Earlier, this area was the economic center of Big Basin. Tanbark was stripped for the tanoak and hauled down Slippery Rock to the tannery in Santa Cruz. One early homesteader stripped as much as 2,000 cords of tanbark a season.

9. SEQUOIA TRAIL — Sequoia Trail is one of the park's oldest trails. It was originally called Roger's Trail after an early homesteader who settled in the area. Here, in the fire of 1904, many larger redwoods were burned. Note the evidence of this fire as you walk the trail.

10. COMMISSIONER'S GROVE — Commissioner's Grove is a memorial redwood grove dedicated to the State Park and Recreation commissioners.

The first park commission was created in 1901 to watch over the affairs of the California Redwood Park (now Big Basin Redwoods), the only state park at the time.

Today, there are more than 250 units in the California State Park system. The state park commission still sets policy for the operations and preservation of State Park lands.

11. MADDOCK'S CABIN SITE — Tom Maddock was one of the early pioneers in Big Basin. In 1862, he purchased the 160 acres surrounding the cabin site for \$7,501.

Maddock earned a living harvesting tanoak bark for the tanneries of the Santa Clara Valley, a thriving business at the time. He also harvested madrone, from which gun powder was made for the gold mines in the Mother Lode country.

All that remains of the cabin constructed in 1883 is the site marked by a rail fence.

12. OPAL CREEK AND THE FIRE-SCARRED TREES — Opal Creek always has been opalescent in color. It is not pollution, but plant-mineral action that gives the creek its hue.

As you walk from headquarters down Opal Creek, you notice black scars and burned areas in the redwoods. They are from the fires of 1851 (the hottest fire in the area) and 1904 (which burned almost all of Big Basin except the area immediately around headquarters).

Two other fires in 1936 and 1948 burned over Pine Mountain to the southwest.

TRIP "C"

DESTINATION — Round-trip from Big Basin Redwoods State Park headquarters.

ROUTE — To Mt. McAbee Overlook, via Hihn Hammond Road and Skyline to the Sea Trail.

12. OPAL CREEK AND THE FIRE-SCARRED TREES — Same as in Trip "B."

13. MIDDLEIDGE — This ridge was used by the Costanoan Indians as a crossing to get through Big Basin without going into the thick redwood forest that lies on each side.

The Indians regarded the large redwoods with religious superstition and thus avoided the deep woods.

When you follow the Middleridge, try to imagine what it must have been like during the time when grizzly bears and Costanoan Indians roamed the area. The scenery remains little-changed with time.

14. McABEE MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK — From this overlook, you can see a portion of the coast where the Spanish explorer Portola camped in 1769.

He was the first European to see the watershed present-day visitors see before them.

In 1864, there were 28 sawmills in the Big Basin/San Lorenzo Valley region, cutting 34,000,000 feet of lumber per-year. One lumberman, William Waddell, had logging operations in the area seen from this overlook.

He had a wharf on the coast and a five-mile horse tramway.

TRIP "D"

ROUTE — Via Skyline to the Sea Trail, Meteor Trail, Middleridge Fire Road and Sunset Trail.

DISTANCE — 5¼ miles for the round-trip.

11. MADDOCK'S CABIN SITE — Same as in Trip "B."

12. OPAL CREEK AND THE FIRE-SCARRED TREES — Same as in Trip "B."

10. COMMISSIONER'S GROVE — Same as in Trip "B."

13. MIDDLEIDGE — Same as in Trip "C."

AUTO TOURS

South Gate

15. BLOOM'S MILL SITE — I. T. Bloom, lumberman and also an active member of the Sempervirens Club, offered virgin timber land to the state for \$100 per-acre.

The state could not afford to buy this land. After the establishment of the park, Bloom built a saw mill, which continued in operation for several years, posing a threat to Big Basin.

If this area had not been a part of the park in 1930, it is probable that it would have been lumbered. Lumbering practices were different at the turn of the century, when clear-cutting was unheard of.

Lodge Road

16. CCC BLACKSMITH SHOP — During the Great Depression, the park department was severely handicapped by lack of personnel. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) filled the void.

They did the major construction, repair and general maintenance in the park during the 1930s. The blacksmith shop was one of their typical workshop buildings. Note the "shaked" roof.

17. LODGE ROAD — Running now from Highway 236 just south of the park to Highway 236 in the heart of the park, Lodge Road was the original way into Big Basin.

Along this road at various times have been a saw mill (the old Union Mill); a pen for tule elk imported from the Central Valley; the original Park Warden's house (located in the area of the present upper residence area); the living quarters of the Civilian Conservation Corps stationed at Big Basin (called Old Lodge SP 15, Company 1913); a Campfire Girls camp; a Girl Scout camp; and now the site of the newest campgrounds in Big Basin — Huckleberry and Wastahl. (Note — it is not advisable, say park officials, to drive beyond the park boundary.)

NORTH GATE — CHINA GRADE ROAD

1. CHINA GRADE, TRAY'S PLACE — It isn't known exactly how China Grade got its name, but it is believed that the name was probably taken from the Chinese workers who allegedly built it in the late 1800s.

Joseph Tray owned the land around Bull Springs and his "place" was a well-known and much-frequented stopping and resting spot on the trail from the "Peninsula cities" (Palo Alto, San Jose and Redwood City) to Big Basin.



salz
of SANTA CRUZ
...selling quality leathers and
leather goods for 123 years.
1040 RIVER ST., 423-1480