

The first 100 years



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Awestruck tourists from Holland pass under 'The Mother of the Forest' redwood in Big Basin park Friday.

Early environmental toehold celebrates a century

By **BRIAN SEALS**
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It sounds like a story of modern times in the Golden State: majestic redwoods are threatened with logging, which ignites a grassroots campaign to save them.

A fairly common story these days. But it happened 100 years ago in the formation of Big Basin Redwoods State park.

This year marks the internationally known park's 100th birthday, and plans to mark the occasion have been in the works for the past two years.

The celebration begins in February and will climax

in September. In between there will be events throughout the summer to mark the 18,000-acre park's birthday.

As the park enters its second century, state park officials are developing a general plan to chart the park's future. That draft will look at whether accommodations should be expanded beyond the current tent cabins and camping at the park.

Other issues facing the park include what to do about parts of a 60-car parking lot on the ocean side of Waddell Beach washed out by storm damage, as well as a fire road up Waddell Canyon that was washed out in a storm.

Please see **BIG BASIN** on **BACK PAGE**

Big Basin

Continued from Page A1

Back in the late 1800s, just preserving the redwoods was the issue of the day. The trees were generally viewed as a resource to be used for production of goods. The designation of Big Basin as a park helped spark a new view of the redwoods as treasures to be preserved.

"It really is the beginning of the change in consciousness of folks," said Dave Vincent, superintendent of the Santa Cruz District of the state Parks Department. "This is when people said, 'Hey, what are we going to leave?'"

The park's origins are now well-known local lore. San Jose painter and photographer Andrew P. Hill was trying to photograph redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains when the property owner accused him of trespassing and shooed him away.

That led to a quest to save redwoods from logging.

Hill enlisted the efforts of journalist Josephine McCrackin, who wrote for the Santa Cruz Sentinel, in the fight and assembled a crew of citizens that was the genesis of the Sempervirens Club, the forerunner of today's Sempervirens Fund, which continues to raise money for preservation.

"We are still doing it today, every day," said Brian Steen, executive director of the Sempervirens Fund.

The original group's efforts led to the creation of Big Basin Redwoods State Park in 1902 after the organization paid about \$100 per acre for the original 3,800-acre site. It is considered California's first state park. The state owned what is now Yosemite National Park, but it was transferred to federal ownership in the 1800s. Big Basin was in place when the state officially designated a state park system in 1928, Vincent said.

Appropriately enough, the centennial celebration continues Hill's legacy by kicking off with a photo exhibit beginning Feb. 2 at the Museum of Art and History. The exhibit will showcase not only some of Hill's work but also 70 other photos chosen in a



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Ellen Steenberen's boys, Gip, Pepign and Puk, check out a cluster of ladybugs at Big Basin State Park on Friday.

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juried competition sponsored by the Mountain Parks Foundation.

"The interesting thing is that it was a photographer and a journalist that made this happen," said Jeannie Eldracher, executive director of the Mountain Parks Foundation. "It's usually somebody in the artistic com-

munity that can convey that message."

A speaker series will begin at the museum in March.

Beginning in June, a 100-day celebration will begin at the park with various events planned throughout the observation.

The celebration culminates Sept. 14-15

with a Centennial Festival that will feature arts and crafts, music and various information booths.

The whole celebration will bring attention to the home of the largest continuous stand of ancient redwoods south of San Francisco.

The park contains 80 miles of trails with elevations as high as 2,000 feet and as low as sea level.

"It's like driving into a fantasy land," Eldracher said.

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