

# Epicenter of quake a hot lure

*Earthquake 1989 - Geology*

## Tourists pour into once-obscure park

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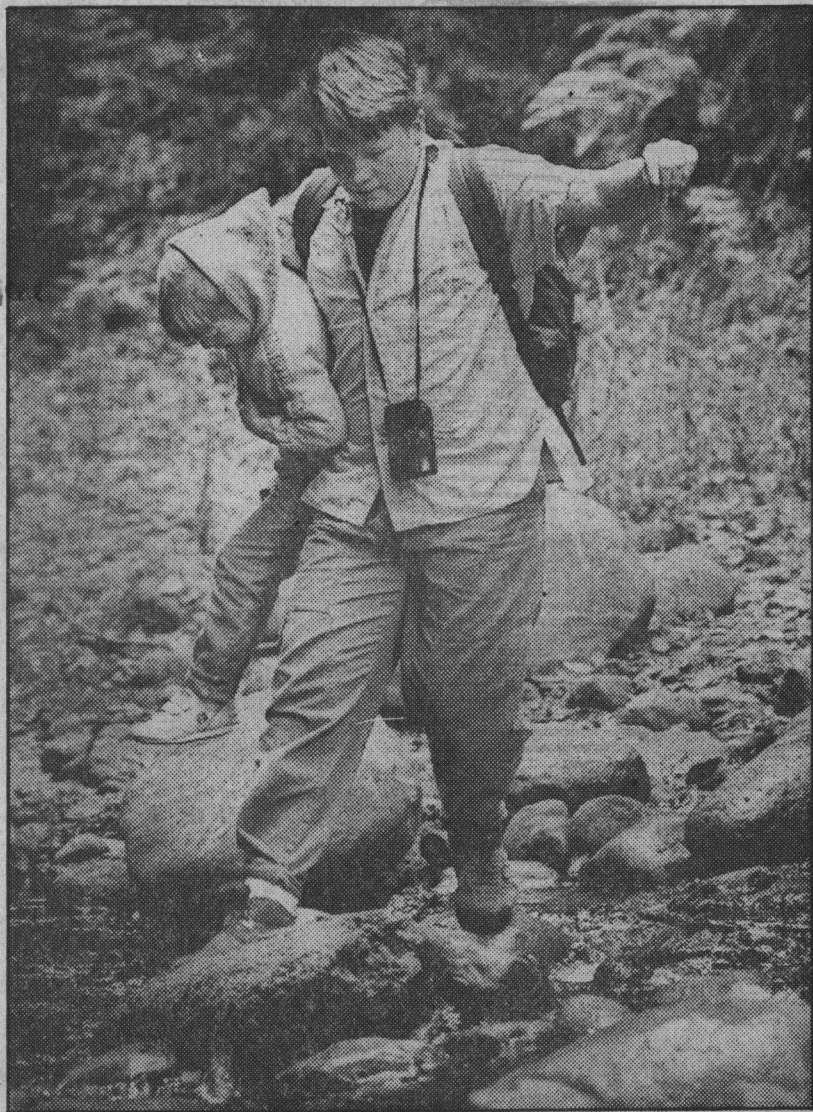
**FOREST OF NISENE  
MARKS STATE PARK, Santa**  
Cruz County — At the epicenter of the Oct. 17 earthquake, huge redwood trees lie on the ground, snapped like toothpicks, and the smell of freshly cracked timber still hangs in the air.

A 62-year-old grandmother visiting from Burlington, Iowa, pauses at a sign marking the site and shudders as she stares up at a hillside stripped bare by a massive landslide.

"That's enough to convince me," says Pat Wagner. "I've never been in an earthquake — and I never want to be."

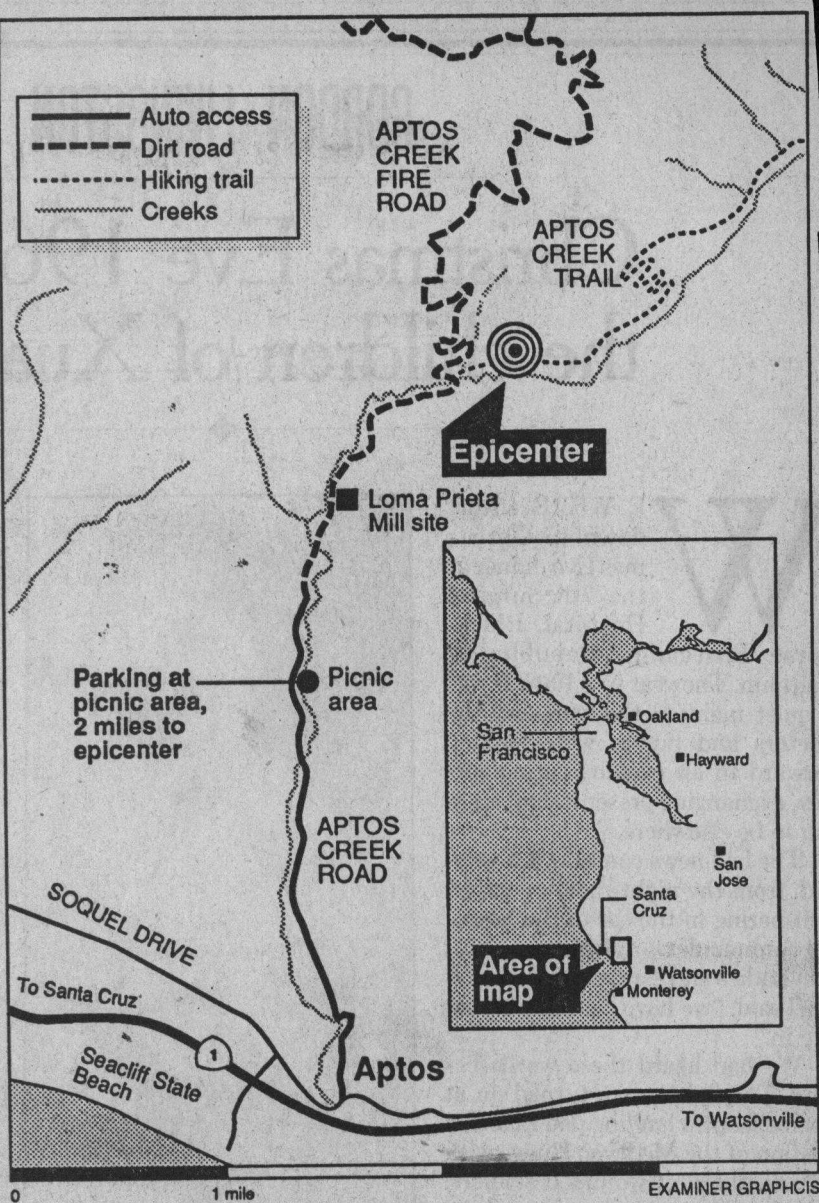
Wagner and her family had spent Tuesday afternoon walking the 3-mile trail to the epicenter, trekking through dense redwood

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EXAMINER/KATY RADDATZ

**Eagle Scout Chip Dawson, 13, carries his 4-year-old sister Amy across stream at forest of Nisene Marks State Park, epicenter of Oct. 17 quake.**



◆ *EPICENTER from A-1*

## Park at epicenter a lure for tourists

forests, hopping rocks across rushing streams and scrambling over downed trees.

They weren't alone. Two months after the 7.1-magnitude quake, the hike along Aptos Creek in this formerly obscure park has become one of the hottest attractions in the entire state park system.

Last weekend more than 1,000 people made the pilgrimage, their vehicles overflowing a trail head parking lot designed to hold perhaps 30 cars. Rangers are scrambling to print more trail maps and keep up with the flood of calls.

Even on Tuesday — normally a pretty slow time for a state park — the parking lot was full and the trail packed with hikers, scientists and the just-plain curious, eager to tell friends they had stood at ground zero of the Loma Prieta quake.

"It's an exciting place to be," said park Superintendent Bud Getty. "This was the major quake of people's lifetimes, and it really captures your imagination to walk out to the epicenter. You can really see the power of the earth."

As the horrors of the calamitous quake recede, other sections of the mighty San Andreas Fault elsewhere in the Bay Area are also drawing renewed interest from this new breed of temblor tourists:

- At Point Reyes National Seashore, the 0.6-mile Earthquake Trail to the epicenter of the 1906 quake is attracting new attention. Visitors can see a fence displaced by fault movement of 16 to 20 feet.

- In Hollister, meeting place of the San Andreas, Calaveras and Hayward faults, a self-guided earthquake walk takes visitors past curbs offset by fault creep and buildings damaged in the Oct. 17 quake. But be careful not to call the town the "Earthquake Capital of the World" within earshot of understandably touchy locals.

It didn't take long for the U.S. Geological Survey to pinpoint the epicenter of the Oct. 17 quake 10 miles southeast of Santa Cruz in Forest of Nisene Marks State Park — specifically in Aptos Canyon, about 7 1/2 miles upstream from where Aptos Creek drains into

follows a gently graded dirt fire road through a dense forest of redwood, Douglas fir and tan oak, past an old mill site and open glens. Alert hikers sometimes catch glimpses of black-tailed deer and raccoons.

After 1 1/2 miles, the route turns right off the road onto the narrow Aptos Creek Trail, which follows the jumbled landscape up and down hillsides, in and out of narrow, fern-lined side canyons and across the creek twice for 1 1/2 miles before arriving at the epicenter.

Rangers late in the week removed several downed trees that had become an awkward hurdle for some hikers.

Some visitors expect to find 500-foot-deep fissures at the site, and a few kids are disappointed not to see dinosaurs emerging from a newly opened channel to the center of the earth.

But the site of 4-foot-diameter redwood trees snapped off at the ground and the 150-foot wide landslide above the epicenter sign are enough to make most visitors quiver at the frightening power of an angry Mother Nature.

"Can you imagine what it took to rip these trees out?" asked Julie Dawson of Milpitas. "And can you imagine the sound it made? Snap, crackle and pop!"

She added: "I can see why this has become a tourist attraction. I stayed away from San Francisco because I didn't want to be a rubble necker. I wouldn't want that in my neighborhood. But there's no one to bother out here."

### More slides to come?

Among those making the hike was Diane Dawson from Jackson Hole, Wyo. She accompanied her five cousins.

"I live in an area with amazing outdoor phenomena," she said. "I wanted the kids to share in it."

Everywhere is evidence of how nature continues to manhandle the landscape. Just beyond the epicenter, the Aptos Creek Trail is closed because of the danger from new landslides. Rangers expect some of the hillsides to let loose shortly after the next big rainstorm.

Farther back in the park, the now-closed Big Slide Trail traverses an 80-acre landslide kicked loose by the 1906 quake. And on the west side of the forest, in Hinckley Canyon, the recent quake

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But it wasn't until Ranger Jerry Waggoner erected a sign there that the location became known to the general public. Rangers say the spot was calculated according to latitude and longitude, and that the precise epicenter is probably a few yards uphill from the sign.

Plus, the actual hypocenter — the underground spot where the ground actually moved — is 11.5 miles beneath the earth's surface. Waggoner's sign marks the closest you can get to it without digging a very deep hole.

### **No dinosaurs and gaping fissures**

The region owes its helter-skelter topography to the fact that the San Andreas, Zayante and Corralitos faults beneath the park have scrunched up the coastal hills like a rug, forming a bewildering maze of twisting gorges and ridges.

The walk to the epicenter takes about an hour, and the second half isn't exactly a cakewalk.

From the trail head at the Porter Family Picnic Area, the route

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Farther back in the park, the now-closed Big Slide Trail traverses an 80-acre landslide kicked loose by the 1906 quake. And on the west side of the forest, in Hinckley Canyon, the recent quake triggered a new slide at the site where a massive landslide buried seven lumberjacks and an unknown number of Chinese laborers in 1906.

At the epicenter, three generations of Wagners surveyed the devastation. Pat's son, David, lifted up his own son to have their picture snapped next to the sign.

"We could have gone roller skating," he said, "but old dad wanted to tell his poker buddies he was at the center."